

Spiritanus *Today*



*Cor unum
et
anima una*



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SPIRITANS
TODAY
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THE SPIRITAN ESSENCE

Jesus Christ's own holiness must dwell in the missionary and this holiness must at the same time be grounded in his heart and reproduced in his conduct by his work and sufferings. Thus after the example of Jesus Christ he will bring forth souls for God in truth because he will be communicating to them the Saviour's life which is in him.

Francis Libermann, 1851
(N.D. XIII, 405)

PRESENTING THIS ISSUE

The Spiritan Research and Animation Centre will produce two numbers a year of a new series of *Spiritan Papers*, the first concerning animation in particular and the second research. The number concerning animation will have the lived Spiritan experience as its principal object; it will be called *Spiritans Today* and will come in a new cover with a frontispiece designed by Fr Noel Tinguely, present superior of the community of Bouveret, Switzerland, which was formerly used by the review *Spiritus*.

The number concerning research will continue the series already in production of the fifteen *Spiritan Papers* in the same format and printing, to continue and perfect that valuable collection brought out by Fr Joseph Lécuyer and Fr Amadeu Martins, to whom we express the sincere thanks of all Spiritans, as we do to all those in the past who have contributed to making our history, traditions and spirituality known, and to those who pursue that objective today. The next number, to be published before Easter, will consist of a critical presentation of all the known writings of Fr Claude Francis Poullart des Places. Thus each Spiritan will be able to have at hand the exact, precise text of the all too rare reflections of our founder, along with an introduction to the historical circumstances of their writing. This study was prepared by Frs Lécuyer and Martins. The English translation will be that of Fr Wilfrid Gandy of the English province. We invite you to order the number of copies you wish from Fr Myles L. Fay, Congregazione dello Spirito Santo, Clivo di Cinna 195, 00136 Roma. We take this occasion to let you know that all correspondence concerning the Spiritan Research and Animation Centre is to be addressed likewise to Fr Fay at the Generalate.

* * *

Thus the issue we are presenting today refers principally to animation. It consists of an investigation carried out by Fr Adelio Torres Neiva, assistant general, and Fr Francis Nicolas, vicar provincial of

France, on the theme: What does it mean to you 'to be a Spiritan'? We asked Fr Frans Timmermans, superior general, to write a note on the moving replies which reached us, and Fr Paul Sigrist of Fribourg to give his reaction to these testimonies wrung from the hearts of our brothers in the great Spiritan tradition. Spiritans will know Fr Sigrist's excellent article on Fr Libermann in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* which was also published as a booklet and is available (in French) from our Centre.

Fr René You, of the Spiritan community of Sidi-Bel-Abbes in Africa (P.O. Box 24), has been kind enough to share with our readers a study on Spiritan religious life which he made for the last Chapter. This study is a discreet clarification of the conclusions of the investigation and becomes more understandable itself in their light. In the same line but in inductive fashion, starting from confidences received from numerous Spiritans of all ages 'across the globe', Fr Alphonse Gilbert presents a simple article called, *A Spiritan Way of Holiness*.

We hope that this present number will please you.

Yours as Spiritans,
Alphonse GILBERT
Myles L. FAY

AN INVESTIGATION OF OUR SPIRITAN WAY OF LIFE

"*Spiritan News* No.34 (March 1981) announced a renewal in *Spiritan Papers*. There would be an annual issue bearing on animation and the living out of the Spiritan way of life; it would carry the results of an investigation made from the Generalate as well as reflective articles based on the results of the investigation". Thus Fr François Nicolas wrote when launching an investigation of limited scope in these terms:

"In these last years, or any time quite recently, have you yourself, alone or with confreres, lived through an event or experience which touched your life as a Spiritan religious missionary (availability, personal conversion, way of living the apostolate, prayer, community life...). Would you be willing to give a general outline of it and say how important it was for your personal life as a Spiritan and because you are a Spiritan?"

Very diverse replies came back to the Generalate: brief allusions or long commentaries; a particular experience or a general assessment of a slice of life; pieces written with verve or painfully elaborated ('These ideas cost me dearly — five hours of my time! In the bush we handle mechanical instruments more readily!') — but always so personal that discretion made us generalize them. Do not be surprised then not to find here the circumstances of time, place and persons given in the confidences. In this form they are still of real interest for what they reveal of the depths of the hearts of our Spiritan brothers. In fact, Fr Nicolas said in the same letter, "Spiritana spirituality becomes known not only through a theoretical study of Libermann but above all through knowing what each of us lives. Reading the answers we can discern certain common traits which will be a help in coming to know what is specific to ourselves". That will be the object of a later study; here we simply present a synthesis of the replies, referring to the themes proposed by the investigation, giving the direct words of each correspondent as far as possible. The replies came from different circumscriptions; many are given here in translation and may lose their original flavour; we apologize if they are not as direct and spontaneous as in the original.

I will finish with a wish for the future, that any forthcoming investigation of this kind may have a wider diffusion and that it may limit itself to one aspect or other of our Spiritan life. Let us know what you think! Thank you.

Alphonse GILBERT, C.S.Sp.

Spiritan Research and Animation Centre
Clivo di Cinna 195
00136 Roma

In the words of a missionary:

'The missionary vocation is to be madly in love with some human group — workers, an African or an Asian people; mission is not the daughter of prudence but of passion'. It is this missionary love — be it madness or passion — which shines through the texts of this investigation like a leaping flame or a smouldering fire under the ashes. Why go out? Why go back? Why stay? Stay or leave?

Why do I go out? When the provincial assigned me to this country I recalled its reputation for unhealthy climate, general wretchedness, civil troubles and mosquitoes. But I had placed myself at the disposal of the Congregation for urgent cases, the most difficult situations; I could not refuse. I answered Yes and prayed not to look back. Next came my ordination as a priest sent to announce the Good News to the poor, freedom to prisoners... on the feast of my native land. I had to go, although it was not easy to tear myself away from all the roots which held me strongly!

Why did I go out? After that testimony of a young Father, here is one of an older man who spent long years in formation work and was going out for the first time.

I did not feel prepared for an apostolate of this kind in Africa (a ministry of forming priests); but before God and as a Spiritan I could not refuse this sign from God by bringing up objections which could cool my superiors' invitation. Between the moments of my decision and my departure I reflected a lot on God's goodness to me, on the meaning and consequences of my missionary vocation, on the practice of our obedience, on the example of our founders and saintly Spiritans,

on the meaning of evangelical poverty as detachment and liberation from all values other than those of Jesus and his Spirit... and off I went!

Why do I go back again? After some years in Africa, this Father spent time at the service of the Congregation in France. He gives his reasons for going back again.

A missionary by religious consecration I am appointed to announce the gospel, the Good News. I want to communicate it, to proclaim it. As Jeremiah said, it is ‘a devouring fire’, the light of the world, the salt of the earth. ‘I was seduced’, and I would willingly say with the apostles, ‘I cannot not speak’. I have the joy and the chance to announce this Good News: Jesus died and rose for all. I have heard the message of the Beatitudes: I want all men to know how to be happy, already here below, by becoming poor, gentle, peace-makers... I cannot keep this treasure I believe in for myself alone: the Lord Jesus’ friendship... That is my missionary vocation, an uplifting service...

Another, after some years in missionary animation, explains why he goes back with a renewed vision of mission:

I feel more concerned today by those towards whom we go-people, particularly the poorest among them. Mission to found the Church, Yes, but Mission is more to bring salvation (all of it) to those who most need it. The gospel appears to me more and more as an essential element in the construction of the world — the gospel, a message of salvation and redemption for beyond, but starting from here below with its demands of justice, peace and help for the development of the whole man. This is what impels me to go back, along with the renewal of the vision of my religious life... A going back which is wished and realized now in fidelity to the first call, with an enthusiasm which will not take the same forms as before but which seems to conform to the Spiritan spirit, inherited from Libermann and lived out by so many of our brothers.

To go or to stay? A cruel dilemma in some countries where the political and social situation is disturbed. Two confreres, a younger and an older, speak on this.

A young confrere: From the beginning I was led to accept everything as provisional: always ready to leave everything, to change house, to lose the ‘stone’ church, to announce the Word and celebrate

the faith under a tree... a way of life based on deep confidence in God and Christ's promise to stay with his own until the end of the world, all in an atmosphere of prayer. As the situation offered little hope for the future it was thinkable to move elsewhere. It was a natural question — stay or go? But there was another question: are not these situations the ones most in conformity with our specific end? To work without seeing the results, to die like the seed in the earth — is that not one of the characteristics of our charism? I cannot see clearly. For me this was all a slow apprenticeship to patience, perseverance, long-suffering, humble abandonment, knowing how to wait for God's moment, to recognize and accept that it is God's work infinitely more than ours, that is to say, to be seized by the miracle of the Redemption. Easy to say but very difficult to accept and live! I wondered: is this kind of mission not reserved to specialists? Then I remembered Libermann's word: 'what is important is not knowledge but holiness'. All that made me admit my poverty and my littleness. To stay, that would mean counting on the miracle of grace, in myself and in others!

An older confrere: We were aware of certain risks threatening us, and of certain dangers we had to combat, but we could not leave the people without a priest and we did not wish to be like the European colonialists who were leaving the country... The most disturbing thing was the possibility of being isolated and out of communication with each other, not knowing how long the trial would last or how it would finish. We decided to remain with our people. We had given our life for their service, we had not the right to abandon them. For me, fidelity to the Congregation was a more than sufficient motive for staying — the works which had been organized, missionary activity by so many confreres before us, the good name of the Spiritans: all this invited us to accept whatever happened, good or bad. If we had to make the sacrifice of our lives, we were ready... I stayed!

A confrere who serves in a Moslim country:

I felt myself called from the beginning to work in a Moslim country. Many people were saying: Why go where there are no conversions when priests are lacking in other places? I could give no reasonable justification but I felt called to those people. In the course of time a doubt entered my head: Does the Lord still love you? I understood that for me the desert of prayer was necessary because I was loving the Lord for myself and not for him. Then I discovered the tenderness of God for all men and I re-found the joy and peace of my first gift... I

saw very strongly the tenderness of the Father revealed by Jesus Christ in Mary. I feel myself much more fragile, less sure of myself, but with total confidence in God. . . The eucharist has a central place, even if I celebrate alone, for all the Moslims are associated with it. All that is good and fine is offered to the Father by Jesus, and communicating in this mystery of love and tenderness I become more a witness of the Lord. . . Mary is present too as the indispensable mother who leads to Christ; the rosary, the prayer of the poor, is truly adapted to this Moslim world. . .

A Spiritan who serves in a new country:

I am in the process of living out a novel experience — a minority Church in a Moslim country. I have to accept not being able to share the essentials of my faith with all these young Moslims I love, to accept too that they will never be baptized. . . and especially to know that God is not limited to our Church, still less to what I do. And despite sufferings and difficulties to continue to live in peace and joy so as to welcome others in truth, to admire their faith at the same time as my Christians, formed in another way, are in danger of accusing me of betraying them. And still, even if I believe that Jesus is truly the Saviour of all, how can I not admire the faith of some Moslims? How can I not question some of the ways of acting within my Church? . . . What counts is not what one says but what one does; we can never stress enough the importance of giving witness and of joy! We cannot announce Good News if we are not happy! I try to be faithful to the calls of the Spirit. . . and I continue to believe in the Church and in the support of my Spiritan brothers.

THE APOSTOLATE also gave rise to experiences which have marked the personal life of many Spiritans.

One confrere began to serve refugees: The refugees were grouped haphazardly in a camp without regard to family units. They were watched and could not leave the camp. Nothing to eat! It was a death camp. I appealed to the Red Cross which brought in food and hoes. At one stroke, thanks to Caritas which was financing the operation, I bought a thousand of these hoes. Thanks to the same Caritas, we were able to clothe thousands of people and give them blankets, utensils and food. . . we saved thousands from death! The roads are

land-mined, the Red Cross works only by plane; ambushes are frequent. God has protected us so far. We can always count on his help. May he be blessed!

Another experienced the delays and sufferings of the apostolate:

I began to note that everything was going less quickly than I had imagined. I would invite people to come who did not come! Failures and disillusionments — the experience was enriching for me. Faith taught me that these groanings beget life. I am convinced that this people is in process of being born for God and that the Spirit is working in their hearts. I never lost hope. When inviting people to a celebration I would pray the Lord to open their hearts and, if they refused to come, to keep my hope alive. I would think of the first Christians. The Kingdom is like a mustard seed, said Christ; one sows and another reaps, said St Paul. ‘Cross the seas and come to our help’ — I heard the call of the Macedonian and I would think of the Pauline communities.

I became aware of my littleness. I had been deluding myself in thinking to convert hearts or galvanize the crowds. Before the little group which were my own, incapable of making myself clear in their tongue, incapable of penetrating their culture in any depth, I cast the seed and wait for God to make it grow in the heart of each one. And, since then, I can say that it bears fruit. Blessed be God!

Another analyses what he found out:

I have discovered what could be, by human standards, a Christian community where the lay people take their responsibilities truly... a community close to everyday life, sharing in the animation and development of the village. And through all that, what could be the struggle of a country for its liberation... I was led to re-examine my way of acting in order to respect the lay people better: the importance of the ministries, the different charisms, a Church which is the People of God where the poor and the little ones are really the first, and finally that the faith when lived has a political dimension and supposes concrete commitment... This led me to come back to the heart of the gospel, to look again at how I understand and live the word of God (a permanent self-examination in community)... That directed me towards a prayer of praise, in admiration of what those around me were doing for their brothers, especially the poorest and simplest Christians... God is extraordinary. Jesus is truly alive, present and risen in the world... He has gone before me wherever I go!

'What are the important things which keep me believing in what I am doing!', a missionary wonders:

First of all prayer and listening to the word of God. Meeting the living God gives me courage to rediscover the world. Then 'development'. I am trying to improve hygiene in the villages, visit the water holes, set up medical supplies, teach the people to look after themselves... It is the apostolate which gives a certain force to all work of development: I am trying to improve my contacts with the people, to greet them, to listen to their joys and sorrows, to make my daily prayer out of those things. I have also published several books in their language for catechetical and liturgical use, and I have made religious broadcasts on the local radio. Community life finally — we prepare our work together, we reflect on our apostolate and different activities; we meet with the Sisters for prayer...

So in all that what is specifically Spiritan? Must we look for the philosopher's stone which makes us true Spiritans? We are first of all baptized people and, because we are missionaries, we are being called all the time to leave home and enter into the lives of others to live the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ!

PARATUS AD OMNIA: The well-known motto of our old Spiritan rule is expressed today in the term AVAILABILITY. It is striking to see how often this attitude of availability is an essential aspect of our Spiritan call. All the replies refer to it, and some of them are particularly enlightening.

A confrere explains how his own availability appears to him. It comes from a new vision of the Congregation's mission.

The mission of the Congregation helped me to become aware of the reality of the world and its problems, of the injustice and insecurity in which a great number of people live. I could never have had an idea of the sufferings that marginalized people go through. Now I have always before me the image of people suffering, exploited and living without hope. I have become more sensitive to the inequality of the human situations which characterize our time. This has made me take a clear option for my life. The spirituality of our founders has helped me a lot in this, especially Fr Libermann whose influence is quite positive in my Christian experience. In the furrow which he

opened my life is decidedly oriented towards Christ. My option to follow him in the way of the evangelical counsels is a witness to my faith in a different world, to be re-made starting with Christ who lived poor, who obeyed and who consecrated himself completely to the kingdom of God. In this disposition, I feel happy and fulfilled.

For another Spiritan his availability comes from a new vision of religious life:

It is new in the sense of a deepening of what it is and should be for me and my brothers. It appears more to me as a following of Christ which should be open to many unknowns, calls, transformations, twisting and unforeseen paths, for his sake... And this following of Christ, with all its unknown factors and precisely because of that, cannot be lived except in community. The three great axes of the religious life, poverty, consecrated celibacy and obedience, which are far other than what Canon Law for religious laid down, ought to be lived, reflected on, prayed about with brothers committed to the same following of Christ. A following of Christ applied to a particular point, the form of announcing the gospel which this community received a mission to do — religious-missionary!

Two confreres explain how, having accepted, in that spirit of availability, a time for updating or missionary animation, they drew great personal profit from them.

The first: I was hardly prepared for the work they were asking me to do in France. Here in Africa I was in full flight. I obeyed. It was an updating in depth for me, for it got me engaged in service of others, the more efficacious because it lasted and it led me to varied relations and experiences. I was marking time. A turning-point in my life, a new start. But that was so intimate on the one hand, and involved so many people on the other, that I cannot speak of it here although I am madly anxious to cry it from the housetops. I thank the Lord! Work, prayer, a deep change, fraternal support — I share all this more easily with non-Spiritanians than with my religious brothers. A pity! The 1980 Chapter had little impact on our life. Fortunately we were able to have a Spiritan retreat in which the director spoke of 'putting in common the riches, sometimes hidden, often unknown, which each one carries'... Thanks to the Spirit who renews us!

The second: It upset my life to come back to France for missionary animation. The first months were painful. I saw that if I accepted all would be well, but it was impossible! I felt this especially when cele-

brating the eucharist. On the evening of Holy Thursday, during a retreat, the Yes came — I saw how much God was loving me! I have discovered during these three years, thanks to different meetings and to prayer, that the important thing is not so much what I do as to live from God who sends me. A group of young couples enabled me to see the tenderness of God in their love. I forged bonds of friendship. I realized that each one is called to live a certain aspect of the gospel. Thus one priest is given to making justice prevail, another person lives in depth the beatitude of peace, he breathes peace, resolves conflicts... Enriched by all that, I went back to the missions. As a Spiritan this experience rooted me into the importance of being available.

A confrere's appointment was changed: At the end of my three months of missionary animation I said I was ready to go wherever there was need — that seemed right in the light of the movements and internationalization of the Congregation. But I quickly came to see that it was not self-evident. Many were opposed to it: my confreres in Africa, those in France, lay people especially with whom I had been working and who felt abandoned if not deceived. All thing brought me to see that obedience is not so simple and that it is also difficult to reconcile the orientations of the Congregation, in certain cases, with fidelity to the local Churches with whom we work and with the respect of the lay people with whom we work. In any case, it seems to me we cannot decide on things by ourselves... So I changed countries. A new uprooting... I had to learn not to judge, not to believe myself more African than the Africans themselves. To be ready to begin again, even by accepting forms which I did not consider worth while. This is a strong call to humility and to be a listener, to see what is essential and to live myself in truth, to discover patience... so that the word may go on, despite everything!

Another insists on the spirit of availability:

I wish to say this above all: to be ready to go back is not a duty for me, nor a desire in the precise sense of the term. It is much more a deep conviction than a choice on my part. 'Personal projects' have always appeared to me as too human, based on intellectual reasoning, on generosity certainly but also on sentiment, taste, an aspiration to feel oneself happy rather than an availability, a holy indifference, excluding neither abnegation nor renouncement, and bringing a deep

joy with it... As for mission, nobody gives himself a mission; one receives it; and nobody is owner of his own mission — it is the mission continued in Jesus, by him and with him. Aware of that I want to live it concretely; I would say that I am available before my legitimate superiors.

Two confreres were 'uprooted' from their missionary task to become teachers or directors of a seminary.

The first describes a recent experience:

At the request of the local episcopal conference I was asked by my superiors to serve in the seminary. Hundreds of young people used to come to our catechism classes, the number of catechists was increasing, the Christian group were fervent, growing nicely. Nevertheless I accepted. What decided me was the desire to serve the local Church. That too is an exigence of missionary life. We told the Christians of the mission that local priests would come later. There were tears on both sides. But I will stay there as long as the superiors desire... That was a valuable spiritual experience, it 'emptied' me!

The second describes an earlier experience:

Twenty years ago there were hardly any open discussions with superiors. Both principal superior and bishop were Spiritans. We had to go along without questioning; objections were little taken account of once decisions were made on high. 'The archdiocesan council and myself have appointed you to the diocesan junior seminary. But who is going to replace me in my ministry of Catholic Action? Dear Father, no one is indispensable in a missionary job. You did not come to Africa to do your own sweet will but to serve the diocese where there is need of apostolic workers'. The bishop for his part invoked the virtue of obedience and when I spoke of dialogue he read me out the written contract of my appointment already drawn up. That appointment was a red letter day in my life as a religious missionary. I had thought myself indispensable and yet all went well after me. And I drew profit from my new obedience: teamwork, community life, life of prayer... This last became again what it should never have ceased to be — the true source of my apostolic life. In the final analysis, I think I profited. With a reinforced spiritual life, my fund of optimism renewed, a little humour also to judge situations without turning them into tragedies, things have turned out not so bad. And I was ready to stay even longer...

The conclusion to this theme of availability is given by a Spiritan of long missionary experience:

The characteristic of the Spiritan for us has been his availability to serve wherever it was most difficult or where there were not enough workers. The Spiritan has always been the initiator, 'in manibus superiorum paratus ad omnia' and sometimes we dared to say 'aptus ad nihil', prepared for nothing in particular and ready for everything. Here the Spiritans accepted manifold services and responsibilities that others did not want, in difficult and dangerous missions, refused by other missionary Congregations. This is what impresses me most in my confreres. Their task is immense...

Fr Libermann invited his followers to be at once apostolic men and men of community. After the theme of the apostolate, it is that of COMMUNITY which provoked the biggest number of answers. Some were positive, some negative. But in all cases one senses a nostalgia for a true Spiritan community which we know how to define but cannot always find and live.

Moving testimony of a confrere who knows he owes much to his community:

Just recently I have lived through a very personal experience. I experienced the infinite mercy of the Lord towards me. How many others have had this same experience? And how can I expose this experience to public view? What could I add to some words of the psalmist? — 'I was caught in the snares of death... In my anguish I called to the Lord... My cry came to his ears'. Everyone can go through a like experience: to recall his condition of being a sinner and his call for help addressed to the Lord of mercy.

But how many people, even among the baptized, can spontaneously keep themselves in God's presence? It is certainly to community life — to which I held on despite everything — that I owe it to have kept my confidence in the Lord, to have been able to continue making my despairing cry of appeal. I do not feel able to express all that I am going through just now — I cannot dilate on the subject. I am aware of having been a sad confrere, without enthusiasm, lost in selfishness, of no value for my community. And how often have I been ashamed

of my conduct, seeing around me confreres so dedicated, so full of charity! As I arrive now — as far as my powers allow — at the term of an existence which was useless for my brothers, I want to try to pray, to pray with confidence, to pray in community. I regret not being able to express myself better! Every conversion is a personal affair, an affair between God and the soul which returns to him. ‘God is all, man is nothing’.

This confrere, from the day ‘his heart opened profoundly to the dimension of God’ had a new outlook on his confreres:

What has the influence of my community and of my confreres in general been on my development? Few of them have challenged me at the level of the heart, of my action, of my faith. Many of them lived the same doubts as I and had the same difficulty or the same shame to reveal them. Yet one of them galvanized me in the path of ‘all is possible to him who believes’. Most of the time I lived with blockages between me and my immediate confreres, having no intermediary, no spiritual person capable of distinguishing the source of our differences, to make us authentic at the bottom of our own hearts and to make us progress. Despite all that, a sense of belonging to the Congregation was forged which made me critical, then questioning, and then more available. Today I have become, for my immediate confreres and those who cross my path, a challenger who is attentive to their values too. With certain ones I am at the point of a deep exchange of thoughts about our way of life. Besides, I see no other purpose for our coming together than this sharing of ourselves. Where that is declared impossible, it is better ‘to shake the dust from one’s feet’ and pitch tent elsewhere. Before each Spiritan community I cannot refrain from evaluating a) the apostolic feel (is it passionate about the gospel and its communication; how much time is given to that)? b) the sense of communion (what is lived between confreres? — a cohabitation or a communion? . . .)

A confrere who exercised a long ministry in Europe before going to the missions complains of his loneliness:

Having lived for a long time in big communities, where activities were more or less uniform, I am particularly sensitive about the necessity of many missionaries of my district having to live, in great part, all alone. I do not know if it was for that reason that, even before the turning-point of 1968, a sizable percentage had left the Congregation. This absence of community life, despite the closeness of our resi-

dences, does not favour the minimum of a life of prayer in common and other spiritual, human and apostolic advantages proper to our vocation and without which our witness of religious-missionary is not perceived. Today, happily, the situation is better: 57% of the confreres live in communities of at least two confreres, but 43% are still alone...

Another confrere appreciates what he has lived in community and wishes for more:

I have not always been a model of community living, but I have experienced how right Libermann was to want community for his confreres: a work that one undertakes in one's own name will not last long; on the contrary, the little that I was able to do 'in community' became worth while, backed up, extended in unforeseen directions and rich in results... Yet a certain regret remains. I think that at the time of the great changes of 1968 we were not quite spiritually ready to face the changes. It was not the changes in the world and in the Church which made many confreres 'leave' — we were just not ready. I think that for some years before, under the appearances of a great regularity, the confreres were not 'living' the gospel. The changes were not enough to re-establish this breath and even aggravated the situation. Yet for some years now, because we have experienced a certain poverty, even a certain chaos, we have learnt again to cry out to God. I think there is still a long way to go. I would like to find among my confreres more support for my prayer, for a sharing of what we really live. There are many things which people dare not say to themselves, through shame or through fear, so much so that many live through difficult situations in isolation until the day when it may be too late. Should we have a meditation time in common again? or a certain 'direction' — not as in the past, no doubt, but to be more 'helped' certainly. When I recall that Libermann spent an enormous amount of time helping priests and religious, when I recall the great difficulties that he foresaw for his missionaries on the missions, I think that we are less 'present' to each other than he would have wished.

A community analyses how it overcame a crisis 'of growth':

We came together for a precise project. Events, needs, calls, made us live something quite different. Very quickly we were launched into very different ministries. Despite the effort to keep in touch, to have dialogue, after some time the crisis became serious. We seriously thought of going our own ways. The principal superior arrived, who

helped us to reflect, to clarify things. Finally we started again, poorer (purifications), more fraternal, more dedicated to the mission, in the Spirit. A crisis which could have been fatal became in fact a crisis of growth. Why?

It seems to me that beyond the happening, frequently banal, there was a 'Spiritual fertilizer' which allowed the still fragile plant to start again. First, the profound conviction that we were there because we had received a mission for the service of the people of God and that we had not the right, for personal reasons, to relinquish it. We believe that, since it is the Lord who sends us, he owes it to himself to give us the grace to pull ourselves together and go forward. 'I am with you all days'... Another profound conviction: to evangelize today, with an eye to the future, is to raise up communities. How can we do it truthfully if we are not men of community? Finally that crisis was overcome because each one personally and the group in fraternity had a strong prayer-life which enabled us to make break-throughs, to question our stands, to see what is at stake in the Church... We have lasted... in difficulties and in joys: a missionary fraternity to the glory of the Father! Truly it is Christ's own force which comes through each day in our weakness; the people are not deceived!

We have received a long letter from an international community which is happy with its lot; we apologize for not quoting it in full:

We arrived in a diocese where the number of priests had diminished from age and persecution. We were immediately overburdened: town visitation, missions, catechetical schools, seminary. The characteristic of our team was coresponsibility in all the tasks confided to us. Certainly each of us is more directly responsible for one or other sector but the mutual independence is such that no one person is absolutely necessary. Each of us knows nearly all the communities of each of the missions. We work as a team, in the sense that we prepare together and quite often we act together. We do this with Sisters, catechists, or other Fathers. This may seem ordinary but the outcome has some importance: no apostolic task is looked upon as a 'game preserve' of the team, and this has made our insertion easier and doubtlessly encourages a spirit of coresponsibility in the diocese. We have not spoken yet of 'life sharing' or 'prayer sharing' or of an examination of our life-style and of our commitments in the light of the human community we live among. This is neither through forgetfulness nor on principle but simply because, by reason of our temperaments and

because of the circumstances and demands of the bishop, our team has found itself rather oriented towards animation and organization of Church structures in the diocese.

It is certainly a pity that there is not more life sharing amongst us and more reflection in common, but perhaps we feel the need for each other more today. Would that be because of the reciprocal dependence we experience in the apostolate? If we are at that point, it is probably because of the serious effort each one has made during the first three years in particular not to refuse dispersion or overwork but to refuse to go off each one on his own, something that circumstances were continually inviting us to by constant pressures and also by the tendency to individualism of each of us and the enticing perspective of a mission of one's own, a temptation all the greater in that we always had the easy excuse of keeping the catechetical school in common. Our experience is worth what it is worth but as such, with its limits, it seems to please the senior seminarians and deacons. What impresses them most perhaps is the fraternal atmosphere of our community...

A young Spiritan of another international community comments on his own difficulties:

Despite the plea I have always made for international communities I admit that the experience of my own has been very different from what I imagined. I think that a team of this kind should be prepared beforehand and in a different way. Language first must not be a barrier in communication; there must be cultural links in particular to unite the team members, over and above being Spiritan; ages should not be too different... Apart from the great difficulty of communication, I see that the different values of each one were a big help in the evangelization of this people, each person putting his charisms at the disposal of the community... The difficulties of language have taught me to suffer pretty much alone and to deepen my dialogue with God asking him the best way to act in each circumstance... These years have been for me a real movement between the cross and the resurrection...

THE LIFE OF PRAYER or A CONVERSION EXPERIENCE were among the facts of personal life proposed by the investigation. Here are some notable testimonies.

From a Brother who appreciates community prayer:

I find every day when we assemble in Chapel to begin our community prayers before Mass a wonderful personal experience. An experience of some kind of strength in times when it seems we as a Congregation are getting smaller and weaker. Starting the day off with men who believe strength comes from praying together is a good experience. I found this same experience as we joined some Sisters and a few lay people to start the day in community prayer before Mass. I found a similar experience when, in another community, I joined two Brothers and a Father in community prayers followed by Holy Mass. We can experience great personal feelings from our work during the day or visiting the sick in the evening when we start the day invoking the Holy Spirit in our community prayers. Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love!

A personal testimony after reflecting on the dichotomy between religious life and missionary life:

I will give you my personal testimony. How can we unify religious life and missionary life? Only he who maintains personally a deep and sincere prayer life can maintain a steady rhythm of apostolic life. My ministry often had me live outside community; I lived more with seculars than with Spiritans. Perhaps I am a bit like Fr Laval, whose zeal led him to some tensions with community life. I mean that a strong link with Christ and Mary make sense of an apostolic life. It is a question of being docile and faithful to the Holy Spirit's action which purifies and sanctifies us, in collaboration with the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mary, mother of the great missionary, Jesus, is our model of contemplative and active life. I think that this Spiritan spirituality is not sufficiently valued. The new Constitutions should encourage it... A deep spiritual life remains the solid foundation of our availability in apostolic service...

A confrere questions his witness and that of the other Spiritans of his District:

Comparing what I live and what I see around me with the religious foundations of our consecration, with Libermann's Instructions to Missionaries, the example of Laval and so many more, I think that I ought — we ought — to become for our people more of a living witness of the gospel, a permanent sign of an 'action life' which is born of practical union with God and nourished by it. I often wonder if, in the eyes of the Christians, we do not seem to them more like religious

functionaries and defenders of a certain moral demand than enthusiastic messengers of Christ's life, truth and liberation. The work is absorbing, but it is especially prayer time which is sacrificed to it! What would the attitude of our founders and models be, possessed as they were by God's Spirit? And what distinguishes us from the diocesan clergy? I am not making reproaches, I am sharing the questions of a middle-aged Spiritan. But to share what one feels with confreres of the Congregation is a way of expressing our desire of fidelity to our Spiritan being in that Church where I have been sent...

Reply of a younger person to the same question:

To serve a young Church seeking its own way of growing and maturing means to divest oneself of Western plans in order to receive and appreciate the African way of living. A divesting which asks for much humility and disinterestedness! A sharing of joys and pains, hopes and doubts. A liberating passage from death to life... Add to that the experience of violence, of the struggle for survival, of insecurity. These circumstances oblige one to turn to the essential: God, and to see Christ in every human face... I feel the need to invoke the Holy Spirit. May he bring about what he alone can — the miracle of faith and grace — in the heart of this people! I suffer from the slowness of the people to become open to grace! I suffer from being such a poor sign of the love of God! This brings me to give my life so that they may have Life!

It is curious that more than ever I want to plunge into the freshness of the great mystics; I badly need prayer, silence, a deeper community life. This is all new for me! And this without leaving the apostolic work. My conviction that everything — my own salvation and that of others — is written into the great miracle of God's love is deeper and deeper. Praised be God!

A moving conversion:

I am aware of living through a new spiritual adventure. What has brought this about? I grew up in a family of deep faith. The novitiate increased my desire for communication with God, but without preparing me for the 'rationalist' climate which was going to surround my theological formation. Theology gave me a real thirst for revelation although without interiorizing it, a thirst to build a new Church although without plunging that thirst into the roots of union with God. On the missions, my projects for a new Church came up against resistant reality. I was working with my head while people wanted to expe-

rience the bottom of my heart. I felt empty before their needs, and I was tempted to reply first to their material needs. Beyond all the upsets (conflicts with confreres and with authority, personal failures) a deep faith in the mission emerged. This led me to go out towards people, to propose the message to them in its radicality, to commit myself progressively to the building up of Christian communities which later on made demands on me. But how was it that despite our activity they did not advance further in interiorizing the message? The signs promised by the Spirit did not happen, or only a little... This led me to question myself. What I had been calling desire for communion was a seeking of affection, what I had called missionary activity was often activism, what I had called apostolic urge was often the fruit of a natural impatience. All these mechanisms and blockages were paralyzing my life and my activity. Doubt covered everything. The Spirit was not yet freed.

At the same time as this exploration into myself, it was given to me to see God's signs on me and on others: conversions, interior healings, the experience of the tenderness of God who forgives, who loves and who appreciates. The help of close friends with whom I could talk helped me to grow in understanding, in acceptance, in self-giving, in a break-through. My heart opened deeply to the dimension of God, through longer and more interiorized prayer. And if I looked at people as God looks at them, would that change? And if I prayed with the faith of the centurion, would God not listen to me? And if I gave praise in all things, with Jesus and in him, would my heart not find peace? Progressively my apostolic action evolved of itself, it became more interiorized. I was entering into contact with people, not only groups, I was entering into the depths of the hearts of men and challenging them...

Openness to the Spirit... For this conferee, this is the truly specific Spiritan thing!

When I look back on events in my life over the last 25 years as a Spiritan active in the ministry I feel openness to the Holy Spirit operating in our lives regardless of the work we are doing is our primary mission in life as Spiritans. The Holy Spirit then can use our 'fiat', our openness to further his Kingdom on earth... As I continued with my concern for students, I became involved with their mental health which eventually led me to help establish services for them... This experience combined with the previous ones began to give me considerable insight into the various forms of community which eventually I

was called upon to use in my work with many different religious orders engaged in renewal... I was asked to begin (a new work for the province). I found I was being called to a faith-walk I never thought possible as well as to make decisions that called for a depth of trust and openness I never dreamed possible... While I do not know what will evolve, I feel I am still being called to live in deep faith and trust and openness to the Spirit. I feel much more confident in this approach to life as a Spiritan than ever before.

Some replies, finally, bore on ATTACHMENT TO THE CONGREGATION AND ITS FOUNDERS. Some indicated the great importance of this for their personal life.

This confrere expresses his solidarity with all Spiritans:

What I like in the Congregation and in Libermann is that one feels free in human and spiritual ways... I notice with time that the Congregation, sometimes in good fun, has saved me from myself. I like very much the faith the Congregation has in its future. It is not a question of human pride but simply of a spiritual attitude. Spiritans believe in mission. Love for the poorest is not a theoretical concept among us. The Spiritan does not like situations which are too settled, parishes too programmed. We like what is 'human', and the human is found among the poorest: in Africa or in the midst of Haitian refugees in the Bahamas or in New York. I have never had the chance personally to go to the front-line missions but I have been lucky all the same: we act in solidarity, and what the confreres do I really have the impression I am doing myself.

Another tells how he went back to the sources:

After some years on the missions I was recalled for missionary animation. To reply to the questions of the young about my Spiritan vocation I had to deepen my own identity. Then came the aggiornamento of the Chapter of 1968. I read the writings of the founders more assiduously. Their experience of God, their conversion, their consecration to the service of the poorest were for me a true seal of the charism of the Congregation... This experience predisposed me to accept the renewal that the general chapters brought and made me open to all the views which were appearing in the Congregation as expressions of service to the poorest...

Influence of Libermann and of the Congregation's orientations:

Liebermann's spirituality contributed a lot to my development, or if you wish to my personal conversion. By temperament I was inclined to dominate; contact with Libermann helped me to overcome that very much. Values which he proposes, like docility to the Holy Spirit, respect for persons, availability, renouncement, are aspects which touch me particularly; they propose a life ideal which favours my spiritual growth.

The system of priorities which the Congregation follows helps me actually too. For me, missionary priorities bring me to that radical way of life demanded by our option for Christ; to follow them is the concrete way of living religious obedience, following Christ obedient unto death. These priorities are God's gift for the Congregation, but they divest us of all personal plans in order to live out the mission that was confided to us. I find the true mission of the Church there, the only one to which the Lord confided the announcement of the gospel to the entire world!

A very moving letter:

Six years ago I suffered a coronary arterial occlusion... I was twelve years ordained... The previous summer I had begun my first foreign mission experience. Being compulsive by temperament, an activist in the apostolic mission, I was very creative and energetic from the natural resources of intuition and logical order. I was determined to master language and culture and make a mark on the mission. Within two months I contracted hepatitis and was sent back home. (Cured and reassigned) I was under the false illusion of having failed on the missions and needing to redeem myself. When the heart condition reduced me to inactivity I was in a severe depression. I made a retreat privately and the recurring image I had was of Fr Libermann. I recalled strongly his own struggle with depression-despair and found a consolation in his urgings to be 'gentle' in my sufferings, resigned to this moment, of poverty of spirit, and permit this purification to work itself out without resistance. No special texts had a bearing. Rather the collected impressions of Fr Libermann assumed a sharp image and he became someone with whom I held familiar conversations. That restored my courage and faith. I have never recounted this story before. Thank you for the grace!

What helps me to discern the voice of the Spirit:

Liebermann's peace and serenity have always drawn me. I have often reflected on his letters to the confreres. He is truly extraordinary

when he is speaking of peace, serenity, gentleness, confidence, abandonment, detachment, prayer and practical union with God, love of the cross, humility in the face of one's own poverty and the certitude of the divine mercy... Mary is always present, like an attentive mother looking after her Son's brothers... All this helped me to discern the Spirit's voice...

And finally a profession of faith and a prayer:

I like Poullart des Places and Libermann very much: the first for his concern to form priests who were solid, not worrying about diplomas, to deal with the poor, the lowly, the despised; the second for the radicalism of his gift at the service of the black race. Since I left for Africa my love for Libermann has only increased. The personal experience that I live interiorly is a work of being emptied out which is going on in me for the past ten years. I feel the call to make a total gift according to Libermann. This is formulated in liturgical and community prayer as well as in personal prayer. I long to know the Father, Son and Holy Spirit better to whom our religious family is dedicated. I long to be in better communion with their common relations. 'To let oneself be fashioned', as Libermann says in the fine image of the potter. So in difficult situations I throw myself before God and there I find calm, peace, even if there is no immediate solution in view... One truth is becoming more evident to me every day: to know how to await God's time... Another dimension of my life as a Spiritan religious missionary: total gift to the Church in Africa. Libermann was passionately for the Blacks. I asked him for that grace and I believe he has given it to me. I am passionately for the Blacks. I re-read the Instructions to Missionaries with joy. Another important point in Libermann is the love he has for his confreres: 'my affection for you has increased a hundredfold... I pray for you and I give thanks for all that happens to you... Love one another, have the peace and union of God among you'. Finally I often ask Libermann for gentleness and patience. It is so important, it is the heart of the evangelical message. To be in another culture, in a world which so often has recourse to violence — I believe very sincerely that people of gentleness and patience are those whom our world needs today! And simplicity too — that is something I like in our Spiritan family. May Libermann, Claude Poullart des Places and James Laval keep us in simplicity!

'YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SEE VISIONS'

(Joel 3,1)

My Dear Brothers,

I was asked to open some paths into the future starting from the reflections and experiences presented in this issue. What future are we moving towards? What openings are there for us? How can the past illuminate what we are living now — our present spiritual and missionary experience? What would the power lines for our 'Spiritual being' be in the years ahead of us? I am sure you will find the matter brought together in this issue very interesting. It made exciting reading for me. I was struck by how closely the descriptive articles stick to the reality of what we live and how the great insights which have been the life of our history are verified today in the testimonies presented here. I am happy about this. I see myself in the hopes and dreams expressed as well as in the hesitations, sufferings and weaknesses which are admitted. Now the question is what to make of this, how to do some crystal gazing? I suppose each of you will do this for himself in his own way to the extent he feels challenged by these pages. That is the important thing. Speaking for myself I offer these few reflections.

We Stand on a Threshold to be Crossed

I am more and more convinced, as is the whole General Council, that we are living at present at a very decisive moment of our Spiritual history. We are living through one of those privileged times when much will be determined for the future.

The Congregation has known such moments in the past, linked to happenings and important transformations in the life of the Church and in society. The very arrival of our founders on the scene was such a moment, the first foundations in Africa, the Fusion, the coming of the young Churches — these were 'God's moments' manifested through various signs. How then can we interpret 'God's moment' which we are actually living? And how live it? These moments of grace call us to make a breakthrough. There is a threshold to cross,

which always entails insecurities and launches us into the unknown. It is hard to leave the familiar behind and go forward; so we hesitate before the threshold. I feel that as a Congregation, in as much as we are a worldwide community, we have not yet taken this step despite many efforts and overtures made in our Provinces and Districts. We must be aware that this threshold to be crossed will decide our own future too. Not to take this step means likewise to deny our past and to cut ourselves off from our sources — and to become meaningless for the Kingdom of God.

Signs of God's Moment

Our 1980 General Chapter tried to read these signs and since then many Provincial and District Chapters have followed suit. You will find a *résumé* of the whole Chapter in the first section of *Spiritan Life, Mission Today* — numbers 8 to 68. These pages deserve to be reread and studied in your communities and meetings. It will help you to enter into the great renewal movement we are engaged in. In my introduction to *Spiritan Life* I said:

We have glimpsed the shape of a new missionary era, calling for profound changes in our ways of thinking and acting. We did not succeed, in fact, in clearly expressing what was beginning to emerge from our discussions and reflection. That is a task which we must continue, along with you, in the coming years.

One of the characteristics of God's moment is that it reveals itself slowly at the cost of an effort in discernment worked out in study and prayer. The way we scrutinize the signs around us, comparing them and observing their interaction, must go hand in hand with an interpretation of these same realities in the light of God. This is done in prayer and in availability to the Holy Spirit's action.

Our Older Provinces

We will now try to interpret some of these signs. In our older Provinces we come up against the problems of a society in great change which is producing new forms of poverty, oppression and alienation. Just to mention a few: drug-addicts, the political and economic refugees who are the migrant workers; problems of ecology, of nuclear armaments and their unrestrained multiplication. The economic crisis causes society to turn in on itself with primitive reactions of rejection and self-defence. It is evident that we are not used to seeing our idea of ‘mission’ in this context even if a hardened paganism shows its face

in it. But how can we pretend to be heralds of a liberating word if we remain unaware of these calls? I am convinced that these phenomena challenge us more strongly than the marginalization of the French soldiers and sailors of our Venerable Father's time challenged him.

The Districts and Young Provinces

I have spoken of signs in the form of new situations and new challenges to the gospel. Let us remain with those for a moment. Our chief commitment has always been — and no doubt will continue to be for a long time yet — the southern hemisphere, especially Africa. It was there we found the greatest poverty in the past and the gospel had not been preached there. Now we have the joy of seeing vigorous Christian communities in these places and the great plagues of their history are no more. What we still call ‘the young Churches’ are becoming strong. Little by little, not without wrenching, the faith is taking flesh in the very tissues of the humanity of these individuals and peoples. In growing up they are shaking off their dependencies and opening out already in quite a new way — by crossing their own boundaries to bring the good news further afield.

But the changes which are taking place spawn new byproducts in society, frequently with brutal violence — new forms of poverty and oppression. Whoever has seen the muddy shantytowns of Douala, or has come across the hundreds of thousands of young people in the great cities of Africa and Latin America, or who knows something of the downtrodden proliferating there, knows what I mean. Furthermore the faith in many places is having a difficult passage with the culture — traditional, imposed or borrowed — from which the new identity of tomorrow is being born. There are the complex problems of injustice with both international and local roots. There are armaments to the detriment of development, there are treaties of inequality.

All of this presents us with new questions which we cannot answer. It is a far cry from the bush station which in the past used to be almost the only thing we knew and which by the way will remain for a long time yet a Spiritan field of action!

We are doing our best but we feel the painful tensions these realities expose us to. From being pioneers we become servants. This is acceptable and necessary. How to serve, though? How to take the back seat on the tandem and at the same time conserve one's creativity and spirit of initiative? It hurts to see young people frustrated or uneasy in the role which falls to them in such and such a mission.

Where does an expatriate fit into a process of inculcation? And what if at times what some African bishops call 'African wisdom' turns out to be simply camouflaged conservatism more paralyzing than stimulating? How are we to react to injustices? How to reply to new appeals if the bishops tell us to stay and continue doing what we have always done?

These are only a few of the questions the missionaries face. 'The new statement of missionary spirituality', such as it is presented in this issue, will come to maturity in such a context, and I have seen magnificent examples of this in missionaries from both North and South. One can only stand and admire the creativity and generosity with which many of us live out the questions and sometimes the ambiguities which 'mission' forces on us today! Sometimes solidarity makes us enter completely into the conditions of the poor, oppressed and persecuted, with the admirable result that precisely there the missionary feels most at home!

The World 'a Village'

Many of the phenomena I have pointed out are connected with the structures of society, often having international ramifications. If we do not limit ourselves to symptoms but attack the roots of the evil we easily find ourselves into politics! And by the way it is no different from when the fight was on for the abolition of slavery. The point is to see how to act. Polarizations can trap us putting our unity to a severe test.

Today all these phenomena good or bad tend to have global dimensions. No man is an island. Those who want to challenge all this with the Word of God cannot indulge in partisan spirit or limit themselves to reflection 'at diocesan level' or 'at Congregation level'. And thank God for more and more collaboration which is happening not only between Congregations and apostolic workers but between all those who feel responsible that tomorrow will see a new harmony born.

"Leave us in Peace"

My fear is that we lose our energy too often in sterile quarrels — between missionaries who are expatriate and those who are not, between apostolic workers of different origin, between different tendencies. Disputes go on about what belongs or does not belong to the Spiritan charism. Meantime some people find an excuse in all this to

lie back and stay comfortable 'since anyhow we are tired of these quarrels; leave us to do our work in peace'. So it was good to see how several Chapters had the courage to attack these new problems and generously face new challenges. Things are always a bit complicated in an 'old' Congregation like ours by the fact that people have done their work so well in the past that they become virtually prisoners of the structures they helped to develop: schools, university, colleges, parishes, and so on. This is so much so that the local Church seems unable to do without these services and practically forces us to continue them. It is often very difficult to see clearly so as to know what to maintain and what to leave for others. And in the process of discernment opinions are divided and conflicts arise with the danger again that the real stakes are missed and those who want nothing changed can have their conscience in peace. In this way needed reforms are not carried out in the works we retain, and needed choices to turn us in other directions are not made.

Other Signs

Other new signs of the times challenge us. Lay people, and women in particular, are claiming a more just place in the Church. Alongside the Orders and Congregations many groups and movements of young and older people are being born seeking a new expression of evangelical life and of service of the Church. They seem as little pre-occupied by 'Church structures' as by denominational boundaries. New forms of community are being experimented with, sometimes in a radical way which reminds one of the Acts of the Apostles. In our own communities too there are refreshing examples of renewal. In the Congregations and Orders the members who come from the southern hemisphere are becoming more numerous and will influence them greatly. The recognized value of the great world religions has already had the effect of radically changing their relation to each other. We are conscious that through these religions God challenges the Christian Churches in a new way. We who have just begun in Asia are experiencing the fascination of this immense continent and questioning ourselves on the challenge it offers to evangelization.

Towards what Horizon?

Where is all this leading us? Where do these signs point to, some of which I have mentioned? Let me now offer you my little dream, let

me risk a jump forward of twenty to thirty years, with all the risks that entails.

I think that our Congregation while diminishing in numbers will enter more courageously into new paths. The sharp diminution in personnel will make clear choices for our commitments more urgent and eventually inevitable in the Provinces as well as in the Districts. Little by little our large concentrations of personnel (*blocs*) will be dissipated and for the most part the Districts will be replaced by new Provinces which will develop from the present Foundations. New organizational structures will be born of new needs. The same diminution of expatriate personnel in Africa will change the image and style of the local Churches substantially. It will be easier for the missionaries, and particularly for those newly arrived, to devote themselves to specific tasks ‘on the outskirts of the Church’ or wherever else vital urgent matters for these Churches arise.

Similarly in the northern hemisphere religious, now much fewer, will be called to play a more clearly prophetic role by their life-style and choice of commitments. I see ourselves more thoroughly committed to the poor and marginalized and our contingent commitment to the education of the young will be more strongly marked by our choice for the poor.

I foresee much closer collaboration with lay people, different from today's. Maybe more lay people will want to share some part of our life and inspiration as the small beginnings of these days give hope of. There will be much more teamwork of Spiritans and non-Spiritanus and I foresee new structures for sharing and cooperation between religious institutes. Ecumenical collaboration will be intensified; doubtless many of today's barriers will disappear. If our Foundations continue to develop as now, the majority of members will come from the southern hemisphere in a few decades of years. And this will change our Congregation to the roots which despite its good will remains still so heavily western and has not yet lost all its colonial reflexes.

Yes, I know I am dreaming. Not that I claim the visionary's gifts but simply that the signs point that way. IF, of course... IF we have the courage to cross the threshold and let ourselves be seduced by the voices calling us and go forward. Without ignoring the foreseeable delays — not always to be denounced as an evil but rather as a fact to be accepted realistically — it is no harm to dream. Of course we cannot jump into the future nor can we simply send scouts forward while the vast majority stay on the other bank. We have to go forward together. How? By all of us trying our best with great generosity to

follow the orientations of our Chapters, particularly the 1980 General Chapter, taking the necessary steps one by one day by day.

Formidable Resources

We have formidable resources, the first being our confreres. Getting to know the Congregation these past eight years I have discovered treasures of generosity, self-giving, fidelity, competence and holiness. I have marvelled at these and that justifies my hopes. It is to be hoped that the confreres will accept more and more to be renewed spiritually and intellectually by rather long periods of updating and learning as well as by a greater fidelity to personal and community prayer and spiritual reading. Well organized prayer and study meetings remain indispensable for this forward movement.

We have a treasure likewise in our heritage and a tradition to get us started. Generations of Spiritans have tried to live in total docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, in the steps of Poullart des Places and Libermann. Simplicity, a touch of realism, facing difficulties with a good dose of humour — these characterize many of our communities. Not being great theorists we approach missionary work in a pragmatic and flexible way. The great love we learnt for the Church prohibits us from all destructive criticism while we can press very actively at times for necessary reforms. In Fr Libermann we have a spiritual master whom many of us have not yet discovered. He shows us a way of missionary holiness which can be translated into realistic terms of today — a way which would have us live in deep union with God in the midst of great activities, an identification with Jesus Christ in the midst of the many situations through which he comes to meet us, first as an unknown face then recognized by affinity. All this you will read in these pages recounting and interpreting our family life.

I will insist particularly on *community* as a great, essential and indispensable power for tomorrow. In a world become more and more inhuman and hard our communities will be humble signs of another reality which God is calling us to and a power through which he means to advance his Kingdom.

Will this dream be a reality some day? I really do not know, it is in God's hands. For the present one thing counts, that we have the courage to stay the pace.

F. TIMMERMANS, C.S.Sp.
Rome 2 December 1982

HISTORY AND IDENTITY

Many Religious Societies present a well-defined image, fashioned from a grasp of the important characteristics which define a group. To be a Spiritan means a particular life experience even if that cannot be drawn clearly in detail. It means to accept both an individual and collective vocation, as well as to be faithful to a mission which gathers men in prayer and work under the Holy Spirit's guidance. When a Spiritan says 'I' or 'we' spontaneously, he does not mean what the Society has in external and changing appearances but a 'hard core' which is the essence of its spiritual being. **The identity of a Congregation is the permanence of this hard core through all the changes brought about by humans or imposed by events.** Any ruptures which entailed a fundamental discontinuity would destroy the identity. To know the past history or the more recent life experiences — on condition that this is not used as an alibi or an escape — is useful for being able to discern better the identity of the Holy Ghost Congregation and allowing its members to be more faithful to God's call.

FORMING PRIESTS

The respective vocations of Poullart des Places and Libermann manifest common attitudes on many points. Successive conversions leading them to the priesthood and, little by little, to a total docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; respect for persons, who are not to be 'directed' but in whom one is to discern God's plan written into their lives; a pragmatic approach to missionary tasks with a spontaneous disposition to adapt according to circumstances; deliberate simplicity of methods, convinced that that is the only possible way to do useful and lasting work; confidence in the Church and refusal to criticize her representatives negatively; sustained endurance in difficult tasks once one is convinced that the Holy Spirit wants us to persevere — all these characteristics have marked the Holy Ghost Congregation deeply.

Circumstances of history have given the Congregation great originality. On various occasions it has been called to an apostolic work neglected in the Church. Poullart des Places was dealing at one and the same time with his 'poor scholars' and with ministries least sought after. Libermann felt called to live with his companions among the freed slaves no one was really ministering to. Some years later God placed him at the head of the Holy Ghost Congregation and Seminary to give them fresh impetus; thus he took on the spirit and work of Poullart des Places whom he hardly knew. But the vocation of the two founders was not to engage in direct personal apostolate among the poorest. Neither of them ministered in the places where their disciples were working. Their first mission was to form priests, a task the Holy Spirit had well prepared them for. Both lived an intense spiritual experience and God expanded their rich natural gifts. The Holy Ghost Seminary Rule, as well as the 1849 Rule, were innovative documents for their age. Docility to bishops, care for priests in providing spiritual help for them, concern for the vocation of the young and their formation in seminaries — all form an important part of the legacy they handed on to Spiritans.

After the founders, a spirit and style of life were created and developed by men like Bouic, Becquet, Grizard, Fraisse¹, Liagre, Lithard and others who throughout our history guaranteed great continuity and cohesion in the Spiritan houses of formation. **They were vividly aware that mission, life with the poor, and preparation for the priesthood are inseparable realities.** Spiritans at present continue to exercise important responsibilities in seminaries or in formation groups of seminarians and catechists. The Holy Spirit calls them to persevere in this course of action according to the traditions of their elders. Like them, they can only do it by creating and innovating with the same serious concern for a valid proclamation of the Word of God. New types of relations between missionaries and local Churches continue to arise and the problem of the formation of 'groups' is very real. In this domain local Spiritans can be indispensable guides for their brothers who come from outside. Experience seems to show that the extreme dispersion of communities does not kill but rather enriches a common sensitiveness, language and spirit. The Pentecost miracle continues.

¹ In the article on Fraisse (*Biographies*, vol. 4, p. 176ff) there is what we consider the most explicit description of Spiritan seminaries before Vatican II.

REMAINING WITH THE POOR

Poor priests for the poor — most Congregations were founded for this end. The difficulty is to stay faithful to the original vocation. To attain this, Libermann did not call for excessive deprivation in his followers; most of them could not have lived it. The Holy Spirit has kept the Congregation faithful to what he did desire, namely, to remain with the poor, to know their language and customs, to live like them — with some indispensable accommodations —, to share the disdain and ‘lowness’ they are treated with. Discreetly, most Spiritans have tried to continue to live this ideal. Every time those in charge tried to turn them into gentlemen of distinction they failed. Those who have drawn the attention of the crowds have been rare, and if some were renowned, for example during the colonial era, it was not always for the best motives. In the last twenty years the Congregation has also lost many external signs of wealth, like buildings and financial resources, and few among its members regret it.

When circumstances demanded it, as in times of great crisis or persecution, these ‘common men’ succeeded in staying on the spot, sharing the lot of their Christian communities and, unknown to themselves, attaining heroism. The adventures of the first Spiritans in contact with the Indians and French colonists in Acadia, the underground life lived by others in a China ravaged by persecution, shows the same thing. We could also point to certain Fathers like Baur, Moreau, Shanahan, whose life-stories have great spiritual value. One could say that the most solid and living provinces and missions had their origin in men who were self-sacrificing and outgoing. Recall the example of Nigeria and Kenya-Tanzania. In times closer to our own, Brothers Wiro, Alphonse, Gerlacus and still others were poor people after Libermann’s heart and deserve to be better known. Many Fathers and Brothers are living and suffering in obscurity at present in difficult situations, remaining on the job because they are aware that that is God’s will. The Spiritan identity is recognizable also in this self-effacing heroism.

THE PRIORITY OF HOLINESS

When in the evening of his life Libermann was composing his *Instructions to Missionaries*, which in a way is his last will and testament, he began with long considerations on holiness. He defined it as

'the life of God in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ in us' (p. 383). Taking up the allegory of the vine and its branches from St John's gospel he explained that the richness of the fruit is brought about by the abundance of sap coming from the trunk. The missionary who does not receive with fervour (a key word in Libermann) the sap of life which Christ generously offers falls into tepidity and a 'natural spirit' (another key expression in Libermann). Every human science, every apostolic technique, without an ardent desire for holiness, is nothing in the order of missionary work. If Libermann wished religious life for his followers it was because it favoured an existence completely dedicated to God and people (p. 431 ff).

The life and writings of the two founders are an illustration of these basic facts. Holiness was not granted to them from the start but developed over the course of a laborious itinerary. After a first quite radical conversion in 1701 Poullart des Places was in a state of complete doubt once again in a retreat of 1704. He was to see the existence of his group threatened all the time and he would die in affliction. Libermann is an example of a similar itinerary. It was only fifteen years after his baptism that he came to a certain equilibrium and to that kind simplicity that was so admirable in him. Nothing was easy for these two pioneers and on their deathbeds they were not aware of having 'succeeded'. The truest image of them is that of men searching, suffering, having to be despoiled of all that was dearest to them. Their only consolation and hope was in prayer and in their followers' dedication. Their way of living out a life of holiness makes us think spontaneously of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and of Christ on the cross feeling abandoned by the Father.

In its most fervent members the Holy Ghost Congregation had to accomplish an itinerary like that of its founders in order to find its identity. Slowly it came into possession of its own spiritual doctrine and its own story. An important date was the publication of the first interpretation of Libermann's life and thought by Pitra. Little by little the documents about Libermann were gathered and published. Then came the time for syntheses and the Spiritans were never short of men who tried to penetrate, widen and adapt to their time the teaching of their second Father. There was a constant effort to transpose these lessons into concrete living. Poullart des Places, for his part, remained unknown for ages. The discovery of his personality and work, even if this is to be approached with caution, was for Spiritans in the first decade of the twentieth century a widening of their horizons and a manner of justification *a posteriori* of what many of them had been

living for a long time. Finally it can be stated that rare are the modern Religious Societies which can be as proud of a spiritual doctrine as complete, explicit and categorized as that of the Holy Ghost Congregation. Yet a teaching is not made to be fixated in, it must be reread, communicated, discussed and adapted. Between 1930-1950 Fathers like Cabon, Janin, B. J. Kelly, and Gay produced works which remain indispensable instruments of research. Their task was continued by the texts of recent General Chapters and works like Fr Koren's which give new visions of the Holy Ghost Congregation's history. The conditions may now be converging for drawing up new Constitutions which could be a harmony for the twentieth century of Libermann's two rules.

It is important for a missionary Society to possess in this way a spiritual doctrine which gets down to essentials. People need models. In their daily living Spiritans have before their eyes the Christ of the Beatitudes and of the cross who is so well presented to them by Libermann's Provisional Rule.

Material poverty and spiritual deprivation, welcoming the unforeseen as a way of life, suffering from lack of success, tropical sicknesses — these are very often their lot. Community journals from Africa and letters from missionaries are witnesses to this; they give witness also to a spirit of faith and generosity and paradoxically to that spiritual joy which radiates from little groups of missionaries scattered over vast areas. Great interior demands and a vibrant happiness often go hand in hand. When in fact one examines the results of 150 years of missionary work in the Congregation one is struck by how great they are. This was not the vision of the pioneers which resembled more what a dying missionary said of himself: 'During twenty years stay in Africa I have had no other horizon than the tops of the trees surrounding the clearing where I live'. The holiness lived by many Spiritans had and still has this aspect.

Sometimes we are afraid to present so austere an ideal to missionary aspirants for fear of discouraging them. To pass over so important an aspect of the identity of the Holy Ghost Congregation in silence would be duplicity before both God and men. It would be a miscalculation, for in order to form truly motivated missionaries it is indispensable to let them know all the demands of the call they have heard. Ease has never drawn young people who ask a lot from life. Before the French Revolution, Holy Ghost Seminary was the one which gave the most austere formation in Paris; it also drew most seminarians. Likewise under Libermann and his successors the Fathers who left for

Africa knew how pitiless that continent was; nevertheless vocations were plentiful and the places left empty by deaths were quickly filled. Thus great good was accomplished. Holiness always ends up by overcoming obstacles.

WORKING TOGETHER

One point common to the different Spiritan Rules since 1848, the principle of which has never been called in question, is community life. **For Libermann, community is the place of rest, of conversation and of prayer.** In this sense he could say to the priests of Belgium, ‘the Congregation régime is gentle, friendly and peaceable’ (ND 6, 439). In some Religious Societies a voluntarist mode of life with exercises of asceticism, discipline and fraternal correction is provided for and practised. This way of living is very foreign to Libermann. At worst, he saw in it an obstacle to the Holy Spirit’s action, who alone can change hearts. Trials are not to be wished for but to be accepted if life imposes them. Superiors who want to lord it and impose their point of view provoke a negative reaction spontaneously². The one in charge of a community must try to obtain with patience and flexibility the consensus, at least tacit, of his brothers. Neither must he try to please but to discern what God’s plan is for the community.

Under pain of losing their identity Spiritans may not reneges on the principle of community life. On various occasions — in the West Indies in particular — superiors have hesitated before accepting certain ministries which entailed too great an isolation of the Fathers. It is a live problem. Never before have General Chapters spoken so well of community life as since Vatican II; at the same time the number of Spiritans living outside community has never been so great. Without making a judgement about the roots of this situation, which does not always depend on those involved or on the superiors, there must be a great effort in the near future to make the reality conform to the desired ideal.

The starting point for Spiritan community is a solid formation which educates to freedom and independence according to the spirit of

² To avoid the repetition of abuses we must sometimes recall to memory those Spiritans who were victims of serious injustices within the bosom of the Congregation.

the Founders. The Spiritan aspirant must be vividly aware that he will live in small teams sometimes scattered over immense territories. Regulations set by superiors are an illusion. **Everything depends finally on each individual's maturity and fidelity.** Many Spiritans are remembered as missionaries lost in their simple missions, but faithful nevertheless, attentive to the life of the Congregation and docile to the counsels of their superiors. They do not like to mark their work too personally, for they know they may be called elsewhere and, after they go, the mission has to continue. The image of the Spiritan who is attached to nothing but his suitcase has its germ of truth. It is the spirit which allowed the Congregation to found many new Churches which took on their own independence without too much difficulty. Education to freedom also allows some Spiritans to live a particular vocation within the bosom of the Congregation. Scientific works like those of Sacleux, Estermann, Van Kaam, Pinchon (who published valuable works on the marine fauna of the West Indies) — we could name many more — would not be possible in communities which did not leave a wide freedom of action to their members. Original people — sometimes in the best sense of the term — have never been wanting among Spiritans, and *fioretti* could be written about them.

PRAYING TOGETHER

The absolute priority of the desire for holiness in the missionary life and the elimination of all ‘natural spirit’ — things which make the apostle worthy to announce the Word of God — cannot be realized except through a sizable investment of time with the Lord. Poullart des Places and Libermann were contemplatives who analyzed the itinerary which led them to God. Their spiritual formation was thorough and they had the time to communicate their experience and their world vision. Texts on prayer form a substantial part of their writings. **To be a soul-friend to others, which was one of Libermann’s charisms, became in some competent Fathers of the Congregation a tradition handed down to our own days.** Numerous are the men and women who have come to an authentic life of union with God and have had remarkable influence on others because they learnt how to discern, under the guidance of a Spiritan, the ways of the Spirit. This apostolate is the consequence of a solid formation to prayer such as strongly marks many members of the Congregation. **One could even say that a Libermannian type of spiritual theology exists.** When Lithard publish-

ed his work in 1939 entitled 'Spiritan Spirituality' he was aware he was giving an original synthesis. In more recent times interest in prayer has reawakened strongly and the study of this subject can now be approached with new data from psychology and non-Christian religions. It is satisfying to note that the reflections on prayer of the last three General Chapters — even if we would like to see them more developed and cohesive — reflect Libermann's preoccupations in modern language. Let us hope that the future Constitutions will deal with this important question in more depth.

According to Libermann prayer has a double purpose — to unite us to God and to destroy purely human motivation in us (*Instructions to Missionaries*, p. 518). The deeper and more constant is union with God, the more the 'new man' develops, then the more he becomes capable of announcing the Word of God. 'Ideal' prayer is contemplation, which is often impossible for the missionary because he is too busy and cannot build up in himself the necessary silence and recollection. But God can allow him to live in an habitual practical union which enriches his daily work in as much as his motivations are purified. What Libermann says of the missionary goes for every Christian seeking God in sustained prayer. It is good to recall with what care Spiritan aspirants have been formed according to the outline we have traced.

If Libermann gives great attention to personal prayer he also insists on community prayer. His successors did likewise. Sometimes one tires of reading in the documents of the Holy Ghost Congregation reminders of fidelity to prayer; those in positions of responsibility have a clear understanding of what is at stake — missionaries who do not seek union with God consistently are untrue to themselves. Personal prayer and praise of God in community exercise a mutually beneficent influence. **Decisive in appraising the worth of Spiritan prayer is the amount of time invested in it, the conviction (Libermann would say, the 'fervour') with which it is done, a careful execution of the liturgy and singing.** As far back as one can go in the history of Chevilly (this example surely applies to many other communities we know less well) one can note the efforts made for a model prayer life. In the line of these preoccupations the 'Ceremonial According to the Roman Rite' of Leon Le Vavasseur was published in 1857. It became the official manual of liturgy for many French-speaking dioceses. The renewal of Gregorian chant was also welcomed fervently by the Spiritans. Vatican II's Constitution on Sacred Liturgy is grasped as a new language for modern times. Deiss's musical compositions, and Tas-

sin's more recently, were born in favourable Spiritan soil. Many missionaries in Africa and Europe take their place also in the mystique which inspires little groups of reflection and prayer. They remind one of the 'Bands of Piety' of Libermann. On this point the 'Faith and Mission' community animated by Ritter and his team in Alsace deserves to be better known. We quote examples from French-speaking areas particularly, because few Spiritans know the life of all the communities of their Society. Nevertheless one can dream in imagination about all the places where members of the Holy Ghost Congregation pray among themselves or with multitudes of Christians; the dream would not be too far from the reality.

Paul SIGRIST, C.S.Sp.
Fribourg, October 1982

OUR SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

A seeking of a new and common link with
our Apostolic Life, one and diverse.

The author wishes to state clearly, from the beginning, that he is not an authority on Religious Life but simply a Spiritan striving, with all his brethren, to become in fact what he is by profession: even that is a gradual and somewhat painful process.

What follows is therefore no more than a modest attempt to contribute to the common search, and should be seen in that light only.

"Show us, Lord, your paths. . .".

I - A GENERAL REQUEST

The history of the Congregation, even in fairly recent times, has revealed forces at work that would develop the "Religious Life" aspect unduly, to the detriment of "apostolic life". We may not forget the efforts made to restore the threatened unity of the two in the Chapter of 1968-69, which declared: "*For us, the religious spirit belongs to the nature of the apostolic life which it animates, and this in return belongs to the nature of the religious life*" (CDD, 20).

While re-affirming this unity, against the two-fold pre-conciliar temptation of apostolic activism and, alternately, of hiding behind formal religious living, both the Chapter of 1968-69 and that of 1974 blazed the trail of a renewed "Spiritan Life". We are well aware of the depth and richness of these texts that treat both of prayer and the evangelical counsels and of community life. Those of 1974 also take into account the actual tendencies in the Church concerning renewal of religious life and "renewal" in the Spirit. Neither have institutional reforms been overlooked: it is enough to consider in this respect the roles of Provincial Chapters, Enlarged Councils and the Generalate

Team "new style". Can it be then, that these texts, these institutions, are already so out-moded that we need once more a re-definition of SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS LIFE?

In point of fact, the almost unanimous request of which we spoke goes far beyond, it would appear, any desire for purely theoretical or rhetorical declarations on religious life. It is on another plane altogether that the problem is now presented: what we might call that of the CONCRETE LIVING OF RELIGIOUS SPIRITAN LIFE.

The life itself is not called into question: the common thinking seems to re-affirm the necessity of religious life as an essential element of Spiritan life. For us, if we are to be faithful to our specific vocation in the Church, a fruitful apostolic life requires the support of religious life. Those who, a little while ago, thought we were moving towards an amalgamation of all missionary forces irrespective of the particular characteristics of different religious missionary congregations have been shown to be mistaken. Undoubtedly, collaboration between missionary institutes has grown much closer than formerly, and all favour the continuation of these mutually enriching exchanges. Nonetheless, no one any longer calls in question the differing vocations and affiliations in these Institutes. In general, Spiritans are strongly attached to their own RELIGIOUS IDENTITY. Perhaps it is because they have rediscovered what an enrichment it is that it has become once more central among their preoccupations.

What is being sought is, therefore, a deepening of our Spiritan religious life. Here we attempt an analysis of it.

II – SOME ASSERTIONS

In the first place, we observe that there is no SINGLE, UNIFORM PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE in our Congregation, in spite of all that is written, but only a number of PRACTICES. A careful scrutiny of how Spiritans live poverty, obedience, the common life and life of prayer is proof enough of this...

Differences of practice may be seen in Provinces and Districts and even in the observances of different communities inside the same circumscription. More difficult to accept, even inside a single local community such differences can exist... at times, also in the practice of the individual at different stages of his life. We defy anyone, indeed, to discern the unity of the Congregation merely in the actual practices he observes in our Spiritan religious life.

That is our first assertion and we may not treat it lightly. Some will see this as a logical consequence of the central affirmation of the 1974 Chapter: "unity in diversity". It may well be that differences of practice of apostolic life necessitate differences of practice of religious life. This still does not justify us in ignoring the fundamental question raised by THE TRANSITION FROM A MEASURE OF UNIFORMITY TO A GREAT DIVERSITY OF PRACTICE. We must answer the insistent request of those who are no longer at ease amidst this diversity, and who fear that soon they will be unable to "recognise" a fellow-Spiritan! How different are our views on what should be the foundation of our unity! We must try to understand those of our brethren who were formerly sure that, wherever they went, they would find the same observance: the same common exercises at approximately the same time; the same manual of prayers which even in translation was a compendium of the same texts; the same poverty (or almost!) observed by a Frenchman and an American, based on the same norms, to be found in the Rules and Constitutions or General Directives, or on the simple fact that always, in all circumstances, permission had to be sought from the Superior, etc., etc... .

Those who seek UNITY, or at least IDENTITY for themselves or for the Congregation are probably more numerous than we realise. Some of them, for their own peace of mind, or, as they believe, in order to give a new impetus to the Congregation, would look favourably upon a restoration of the former uniform practical directives to be observed by all. This is what they meant by their request for a "renewal" of Spiritan life.

Perhaps we are justified in an a priori rejection of such formalism, from which the Congregation has suffered in the past. But, we may not reject it out of hand, without examining the underlying question it implies: WHAT CONSTITUTES THE UNITY OF OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE AMIDST SUCH DIVERSITY OF PRACTICE? Is the diversity justified, and if so, how can we reconcile it with authentic fraternity in religious life?

The question is not a simple one, more especially in view of the real danger existing today of the Congregation crumbling away by erosion. Though the evil has not yet attained great proportions, we are experiencing a "half-flight" from the Institute of some members. In view of what, rightly or wrongly, they consider to be rigid formalism in the common observance of Spiritan religious life, some, while preserving their juridical ties with the Institute and even sharing in the common project, look elsewhere: they are attracted to where they think they will find greater fervour of approach to Christ, greater readiness to

listen to the voice of the Spirit, greater fraternal communion and exchange: "charismatic groups", "renewal groups", "focolari", "communities of life" etc. In some cases, the attraction goes beyond what is apostolically necessary or beyond a healthy pluralism. The "other" has become the object of preference and of disengagement from one's own community.

It would be easy to say that "these, as much as the others, are looking for security", or that "they are influenced by the fashions of the day..." The real question is: why do they not find what they are looking for in Spiritan religious life? We may ask further: how long will they continue to live torn between two loyalties; how long before they make a definite choice of what they esteem "the answer for tomorrow", as opposed to remaining with a "moribund" Institute, unable in their view, to transmit to its members a dynamic religious life. How long, finally, will they be satisfied to remain bound to other Spiritans by the single thread of a "common apostolic vocation", a "common project"? And yet it must be acknowledged that very often these same people are the first to appreciate our rich spiritual heritage, as found in the writings of our Venerable Father or in the directives of more recent General Chapters. They are happy to share these riches with the groups of their adoption but they find lacking, or at least insufficiently evident among Spiritans, the vitality, the driving power they have a right to expect.

There are of course also those, probably the majority, who reject a return to the excessive formalism or stultifying uniformity of the past. These believe that the Institute guarantees them the possibility of living an "original" religious life in harmony with the inspiration of our Founders in the continuity of a tradition which has produced many fruits of holiness even in our own day. But, this great majority also believes that this richness is not highlighted as it should be and also that it is DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE THE HARMONY, SO MUCH YEARNED FOR, OF APOSTOLIC ACTION, AS DEFINED IN THE 1974 CHAPTER, AND AN AUTHENTIC RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Briefly then, from all this it would appear that, in general our brethren are seeking a new and common CONSISTENCY IN SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS LIFE, A HARMONY BETWEEN THE APOSTOLIC CALLING AND THE RELIGIOUS LIVING OF SPIRITANS; A HARMONY IN WHICH, WITHOUT RETURNING TO FORMAL UNIFORMITY, EACH ONE CAN SHARE AUTHENTICALLY IN THE SAME SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS LIFE AND REALISE TO THE FULL THE VOCATION WHICH LED HIM, LIKE SO MANY OTHERS, TO CHOOSE THIS WAY OF LIFE.

In a word, where do we find TODAY the specific character of this "religious APOSTOLIC life" which Libermann desired for his Institute? That question lies at the heart of our debate.

III – OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE-STYLE IS DETERMINED BY OUR APOSTOLIC LIFE

We are aware of the basic text of the Commentary on the Provisional Rule of Libermann. We should have no hesitation in getting back to it.

"Every Congregation in the Church" it says, "has its own special spirit, in accordance with its intended objective. Thus, Trappists are known for their spirit of penance; Carthusians for their spirit of prayer. In common with other missionary Congregations we should be distinguished by our apostolic spirit. It is not for us to assume the habits of Carthusians but those which prepare us for the apostolate. For that, the great means is to keep our gaze fixed on our Lord in his life of service and on the Apostles. These are our models".

(— Règle Provisoire, p. 147).

Clearly, for Libermann, Spiritan religious life is closely linked to apostolic life and the principal models are "Our Lord in his life of service, and the Apostles. That briefly sums up our SPECIFIC EVANGELICAL WITNESS in God's Church.

AS SPIRITANS WE ARE ONE IN OUR DEEP-SEATED DESIRE, CORRESPONDING TO A SPECIAL CALL OF GOD RATIFIED AND APPROVED BY THE CHURCH, TO PERPETUATE IN OUR DAY WHAT JESUS DID WITH THE APOSTLES IN HIS DAY: AND WHICH THEY CONTINUED TO DO IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH.

Have we sufficiently considered the variety in time and space of these undertakings? The same "apostolic ministry" of Jesus in his short life has many different facets: his preaching in the towns and countryside of Galilee is clearly different from his painful journey up to Jerusalem, and especially from the vicissitudes of his last week on earth. Though part of the same apostolic ministry, the Sermon on the Mount is radically different in tone from his encounter with the

Samaritan woman. No one would claim either that the Apostles had all the same apostolic approach, nor indeed that the approach remained the same all through the life of each of them. Paul in his apostolic journeys is as true to his apostolic vocation as Paul in prison, but was not the apostolic style different in each instance? The expression of his "spirituality" was markedly different in both circumstances. The Epistles themselves testify to this change.

We know all that already, of course: we know too that our Spiritan life in its different stages shows different characteristics. We do well, nonetheless, to remind ourselves of these things.

Because all share one and the same vocation, to be witnesses to the apostolic life, we find ourselves united to each other in the same Congregation. But clearly, a young man, just invited like the two young men in the Gospel to "come and see" cannot follow Christ in the same way as an old one who, like John in his old age, has found the simplicity of the one thing necessary in deep apostolic prayer.

Again, apostolic poverty cannot be lived in the same way by a professor at Duquesne University and by someone working amongst the Marwaris in Pakistan, with only a bed and a few pieces of crockery as furniture; its practice is different too in the case of those in prison, as some of our brethren have been in the past. That similar differences can exist inside the same community is something that cannot be denied.

We can say the same about EVERYTHING in our Spiritan religious life: in community life (this pluralism was noted by the 1974 Chapter) as well as in obedience, poverty, chastity, prayer, asceticism. In stating that, it is not enough to remain at the level of external observance only: it should be, so to speak, the joy of ALL OF US to be witnesses to the inexpressible richness of the apostolic life of Jesus and his apostles, with its many different expressions according to time and place. We have no need to theorise about this: it is enough to look at or listen to our brethren to rejoice in the extraordinary richness of the apostolic life of Jesus and his apostles to which Spiritans give witness.

Above all else, a Chapter should be a full fraternal sharing of this common treasure. It was that desire that made the disciples of Jesus impatient to tell him, after a missionary journey, of their apostolic experiences. Then, they gave thanks through him to the Father, the master of the harvest. How trivial our "problems" would seem if we did likewise. We should find the answer to them in a prayerful listening to the Lord, to our mutual edification, rather than in debates modelled on the procedures of contemporary democratic Parliaments.

Such debates are only as good as the speakers: we can only get out of them what we put into them — “our ideas”, “our arguments” which when formulated are as lifeless as a statue new-come from the hands of the sculptor. Beautiful such a statue may well be, an object of admiration, yet it can never touch the heart, never even hold out the warm hand of friendship to one who has lost hope, or who believes no more...

Too often, that is the effect of Chapter texts on those who need them most. Conversely, the cheerful echo, in Chapter, of what the brethren have tried to live, their example, their friendly appeal, and especially their prayer, is otherwise efficacious in encouraging the individual to set out anew, to take his place wholeheartedly in the common apostolic witness: and that, in the company of Jesus and his brothers, who had one day welcomed him and in whose presence he had once solemnly vowed himself to walk through life on the same road.

No doubt, as it did for missionary commitment in 1974, the Chapter will have to affirm the need to recognise THE SPATIO-TEMPORAL PLURALISM OF SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS APOSTOLIC LIFE in a unity of common witness of apostolic life, after the example of Christ and his apostles.

But why? And how?

IV – HAS A NEW APPROACH TO MISSION BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR A NEW APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS LIFE?

Undeniably, since the Council, and more especially since the 1968-69 Chapter, we have in our Institute developed a new attitude to Spiritan religious life. That this new approach has not yet been fully implemented is evident from the “birth pangs” of which we still hear. Clearly, these modifications in our religious life were made necessary if we were to adapt to the new concept of mission prevailing in the Church. While it is not important to illustrate this in detail, it does seem important for us to examine whether, as the Venerable Father advised, our religious conduct has been so deeply influenced by our apostolic life as to bring about the unity, “the common cohesion” of which we have already spoken. It is not at all sure and perhaps it is there that the shoe still pinches.

The new approach to mission, confirmed by conciliar texts, results from the "NEW" APPROACH TO THE UNIVERSALITY OF SALVATION, provoked by the serious upheavals in the Church and the world in the last 50-60 years. Most significant in this respect, it seems, is the ending of the colonial era and the coming into being of the young Churches.

If we may be pardoned for limiting ourselves to a very broad outline of the past (the full reality is more difficult to unravel) we may see briefly what actually happened and show how the missionaries were affected by this sudden development¹.

IF OUR OWN CONSTITUTIONS HAVE NOT CHANGED SUBSTANTIALLY FROM THE BEGINNINGS UNTIL RECENT TIMES, THE REASON IS THAT THE CHURCH, LIKE THE WORLD OF WHICH IT IS A PART, WAS ITSELF STABLE, UNCHANGING. General Chapters then were of short duration: general agreement was quickly arrived at on a few changes of detail required as a concession to modernity. Fundamentally, nothing was seriously queried because the prevailing view of Church and world was accepted without question.

Our Congregation was born in an age when all Europe was in a ferment of colonial expansion. It could not, therefore, but be influenced by the current ideology: western culture was best and deserved to be extended to, even imposed, on the rest of the world. This thinking lasted until shortly after the second world war.

From the time of Constantine most likely, there prevailed in the Church a particular view of the universality of salvation, the corollary to which was: "outside the Church there is no salvation". Men were divided into "The Church" and "the others", whose chances of salvation were slight indeed! It was only right therefore that the Church should seek to extend its boundaries to embrace these "others".

When the Christian West discovered other peoples, whose existence had hitherto been unknown, its legions of evangelists were quickly on the way of conquest. The missionary zeal aroused by the discoveries of the XV-XVII centuries and led by St Francis Xavier and others is well known: so also is the more recent discovery of the black races, which so moved Libermann in the last century. It is not our intention to depreciate in any way this missionary drive. It was Jesus himself who first gave instruction always to seek new fields in which to preach the Good News — to the ends of the earth. Neither dare we doubt the generosity and apostolic effectiveness of the men and women who ral-

¹ For a batter picture of this I refer the reader to my article: "A Plea for a New Missionary Spirituality", in SPIRITUS, N. 74.

lied to the call. The Church herself has recognised the holiness of many of these witnesses to Christ, some of whom, after the example of the Apostles, paid the price in their own blood. We have no cause to be ashamed of a Father Laval nor of the many holy Spiritans whose names will never appear in the liturgical calendar.

We simply state that it took time to become aware of a double misunderstanding and of a STRANGE ALLIANCE.

A TWO FOLD MISUNDERSTANDING: yes, on the part of the western powers in the first place: in their pretence of cultural superiority and the consequent right to impose this culture. There is no need to stress the point. We all know the consequences of a pluralism now globally acknowledged even if still in our day sometimes savagely flouted. It is the entry on the world stage, with the coming of independence, of whole new groups of peoples, whose cultures were hitherto unknown or ignored. We shall see that that was not without its repercussions on religious life today.

The second misunderstanding was the progressive substitution of UNIFORMITY FOR UNIVERSALITY in the Church: one language, one highly centralised authority, one theology, one pastoral approach, etc., etc. We know too, but it is well to repeat it, that there was also only ONE RELIGIOUS LIFE, whose constitutions in consequence were almost carbon copies of each other. So true is this that one marvels how the particular Institutes managed, sometimes helped by Indults and privileged exceptions, to preserve their specific identity.

This twofold mistake was strengthened by a STRANGE ALLIANCE — rather a misalliance subject to many domestic quarrels, but from which it was difficult to get a divorce. This was the alliance of the Church and the Civil Power. We have seen the consequences of this and, limiting ourselves to the subject in hand, we recall how THE MISSIONARY, WHETHER HE WISHED IT OR NOT, WAS INEVITABLY CAUGHT UP IN THIS ILL-ASSORTED ALLIANCE, UNIVERSALIST AND UNIFORMISING, OF WESTERN CULTURE AND THE CHURCH.

This situation influenced also missionary religious life. We do not refer to the constituent principles of religious life. These cannot be changed by "exterior" causes. They have remained the same since Benedict and his contemporaries: even, we believe, since peace returned to the Church after the great persecutions, men and women have undergone martyrdom in defence of certain ways of life so that, before the world and the Church, they might continue to give unceasing witness to the radicalism of "sequela Christi". Here, we wish to speak of HOW, CONCRETELY, THIS LIFE SHOULD BE ENVISAGED.

The missionary who commits himself to religious life is necessarily marked by his APOSTOLIC ENGAGEMENT. As we have seen, Liberman never thought of Spiritan religious life other than as closely allied to the fundamental Spiritan vocation of leaving his father's house, of going out "elsewhere" to announce the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

It can be said that this close alliance existed, and we are not just referring to exercises of piety. What distinguished then, and still does, the "religious life" of the missionary of not so long ago?

There is always danger than an analytic approach may falsify the reality. Still, in order to make clear the suddenness of the change, we are obliged to consider Spiritan religious life on two levels: first on that of HUMAN ASPIRATION (human self-fulfilment) and then on that of APOSTOLIC VOCATION².

Without judging the deeper motivation of human aspiration at the root of his choice of life, we discern nonetheless how the missionary shared with the seeker of adventure, the colonialist, even the soldier, the same desire to leave his country in search of "somewhere else", whose "strangeness" had been vividly pictured for him by his predecessors. He had been very much attracted by the unexpectedness of something foreign, and was conscious moreover that he had been confided with a "mission" (the ambiguity of which had not been suspected) of enlarging the geographical frontiers of his own particular culture, with all the stimulating challenge of difficulty: of climate, of people, of things.

It is not our purpose here to pass an ethical judgement on this deepseated desire that stirred so many people, men and women, but to see how, necessarily, it shaped our approach to religious life. In order to carry out his intended work, such a man forged himself a certain ASCETICAL SPIRIT: he had to sacrifice his life-surroundings, his family, a particular style of common life. In spite of himself his soul was marked with a spirit of conquest — he was a leader — very much in harmony with the "determination of will" of our religious formation. He had to discipline himself to face up to difficulties, to overcome the forces of evil... many are the elements of our religious life which could be cited as stamped with this common "fundamental desire". We could add that to realise such an adventure successfully a man had to be a builder, an organiser, an animator, for everything had to be

² See article in SPIRITUS, N. 74 already referred to.

started from scratch. In consequence, the spirit developed was more "extrovert" than "introvert", the spirit of a leader rather than of a servant.

We can easily appreciate how much times have changed in this respect. Though the missionary vocation arouses still the desire to leave one's own family, country and culture for another, it requires ANOTHER TYPE OF MAN. We shall come back on this point later.

Meantime it remains true that the original character of a vocation comes from what happens where God's call meets human desiring: the life of the one called carries the impress of the context of his call. The one called is of necessity moulded by the Church and by how she herself receives the mission of the Lord in a particular era or a particular place. We have already set down summarily how mission, and especially universality of salvation was understood for centuries. Spiritan religious life, no more than the life of other missionaries, could not escape being influenced by that. Our prayer, our ascetical practices were stamped by it. This religious life, even though missionary, must be modelled on the highest forms of religious living of the western world, if we were to be the propagators of it elsewhere: renunciation, like that of a MONK; community life like that of the great monastic community³, even though it seemed difficult of achievement in other climes and in concrete apostolic situations: obedience, highly centralised, almost military in style, because more effective in spreading the Kingdom of God: poverty, viewed somewhat as a lightening of a soldier's load so that he may move around more easily when in action; chastity was more complex, but in addition to the fact that a Spiritan was considered principally as a priest, and that priests were celibate, there was also the monk's renunciation of the world, pushed to the excess of mistrust of women and the transference to Africa of the "cloister" with all that signified for the apostolate!

Remember, for example, the novitiate before the 1960's. Yes, we learnt to pray, a prayer nourished on the Scriptures, but was it related to apostolic life? Official prayer, in the tropics and below the Equator, was it not, and rightly, the same in its expression? It was also normal that personal prayer should have a character of "universality" as then understood: the prayer of the "conqueror", of one who has "need of

³ Observe that the Congregation has given many vocations to monastic life. Is this something to regret? It is at least a significant indication of the close links between the two forms of religious life.

divine power" to carry forward the extension of the Kingdom, a prayer which "re-charged the batteries" to produce a stronger current.

This obviously calls for a more exact and deeper analysis, beyond the scope of the present work. Before going further however, we would insist again that it is not our wish to judge, still less to ridicule, an approach to Spiritan religious life which, as we have already stated, undoubtedly produced a multitude of holy missionaries. Neither is our aim to break down the principles of religious life, which remain as they were in their constituent parts. We aim rather to show how concretely they were understood and lived in a western Church "on the march", in a certain type of "mission".

It must be admitted without hesitation: THERE WAS A COMMON BOND BETWEEN APOSTOLIC AND RELIGIOUS LIFE, AS BETWEEN THE MISSION AND PASTORAL PRACTICE, CATECHETICS, OR EVEN THE THEOLOGY BROUGHT BY THE MISSIONARIES, even though the conditions of life sometimes gave rise to serious difficulty of adaptation, especially at the level of community life. Chapter minutes are full of remarks, repeated and re-written, on religious community exercises, or on community life itself... Religious life was directed from the "CENTRE" (i.e. the Generalate, and more especially the S.C. of Religious...) This was quite logical given the view of the Church that prevailed then... It was coherent). May we cite one small detail to illustrate this: the canonical visitor deemed it his duty in a certain District, where coffee was served after meals (in a country where coffee was the usual drink) to protest: "It is not done at the Rue Lhomond!" By contrast, he did not esteem it necessary to speak of the use of wine (even though extremely expensive to import) because wine was normal at the Mother House. A small thing, no doubt, but how revealing!

V - THE NECESSITY OF A NEW COMMON BOND BETWEEN OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE AND OUR APOSTOLIC LIFE

In the present pluralist climate in the world and the Church, and in view of the new concept of Universality in the Church, THE MISSIONARY CAN NO LONGER LIVE INSPIRED BY THE "SAME" FUNDAMENTAL DYNAMISM AS BEFORE, NOR THE "SAME" SPIRITUALITY, NOR THE «SAME» RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Even if doubt is not cast upon his desire to leave his own country for another, to realise his ambition he will now need, not the virtues of a "conqueror", who comes proclaiming one undivided truth, nor the

courage to face opposition and difficulty. He will need A SOLID TRAINING IN DIALOGUE, AN ABILITY TO RECEIVE AS MUCH AS TO GIVE, TO WELCOME RATHER THAN TO IMPOSE, TO BE FRATERNAL RATHER THAN TO BE CONDESCENDING. He will need THE VIRTUES PROPER TO A STRANGER, TO AN EXILE AT TIMES, MORE THAN THE VIRTUES OF THE CONQUEROR.

Will the missionary of the future be the same kind of man? Without wishing to push the comparison too far, we could say that THERE IS ANALOGICALLY AS GREAT A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MISSIONARY OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY AS BETWEEN THE "COLONIALIST" OF THE PAST AND THE "CO-OPERATOR" OF THE PRESENT.

It is important for us to examine the human criteria we would set for admitting a young man to join us today. Perhaps the Chapter will state them. If, for example, the French Province thought it useful to send its young people to the missions for a period, BEFORE THE NOVITIATE, the reason was to better assess whether the candidate could really live the new type of mission. One incapable of dialogue could not be accepted... Can a person who judges everything in the light of his own proper culture only, really, be at home with people of another culture.

What is true merely on the human level is much more so on the level of religious life. Religious life is not something outside the affairs of time. Like everything evangelical, it must be incarnated in a man⁴, a place, a Church. The fundamentals on which religious life is built, drawn from the Gospel to whose radicality they wish to bear witness, ARE MEANINGLESS UNLESS LIVED CONCRETELY IN A CERTAIN PLACE, IN UNION WITH A PARTICULAR CHURCH. If there was ever a time (and there was!) in which a certain monolithic structure in the Church and the Congregation was believed in, the reason was precisely the intention of re-creating elsewhere the same cultural and ecclesial conditions as at the home base.

IF OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE IS TO BE FAITHFUL TO ITS ORIGINAL INSPIRATION IT MUST UPDATE ITSELF, NOT MERELY IN VIEW OF THE EVOLUTION THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD, IN ALL ITS ASPECTS, BUT WITH REFERENCE ALSO TO THE COUNTRY, CULTURE AND

⁴ It should be well understood that there is no intention of denying the importance of the missionary, his origins and culture (even though we hold that religious life is necessarily influenced by the place and Church that receives him). Only a man steeped in his own culture can adapt to and accept another. That is a rule of psychology, and for that reason the French Province insists on establishing a young man firmly in his own culture. Only then will he be able to take root in another and adopt another style of religious life required by his mission.

CHURCH IN WHICH IT IS CALLED TO GIVE WITNESS TO THE GOOD NEWS. The missionary should therefore live, in the depths of his own being, and at the level of his personal religious life, the new understanding of universality. Why indeed should he not do in his religious life what he has already accepted to do in pastoral practice, in catechetics and in the liturgy? A stranger from abroad, he should, in his religious life, conform to the rules of hospitality common to the people of the country and the Church that welcomes him. Moreover, if he really wishes to be faithful to the Lord's call, he must ESTIMATE THE ROAD THE LORD WANTS HIM TO FOLLOW IN THE ACTUAL CONTEXT IN WHICH HE IS CALLED TO LIVE. If not, it may happen that the religious life he led, in a French or English setting (which was an authentic way of asceticism, poverty, obedience, fraternity) will become, in another setting, a harmful piece of play-acting, even of contempt of the Lord, because of lack of respect for our brothers in Christ. Let us take just three examples.

We have criteria for living POVERTY in a country where it is the duty of the christian, in the name of the Gospel, to destroy the myths of a consumer society and to identify himself with the poor in renunciation as witness to the liberty of Christ. The same criteria of witness to evangelical poverty cannot hold amongst those who aspire to improve their lot but amongst whom much importance is placed on sharing. Here we cite the example of the initiative of our brethren in Madagascar who have decided to give to their secular confreres in the island the surplus of what they have received from abroad after their own needs have been met.

THE SAME IS TRUE OF OBEDIENCE. In the home country of the missionary the anchorage is not the same for it as in a young church. And yet, alas, we have examples of missionaries, previously independent and individualistic, suddenly becoming most obedient to superiors because this or that Superior provides them with an escape from facing up to their difficulty of really adapting, and because they find such an attitude more reassuring than being genuinely useless servants, obedient to the true authorities in the church, with all that implies of asceticism and conversion. Many present tensions would no doubt be more easily resolved if we lived our obedience to Christ more fully in a Church where the initiative is no longer ours.

The same comparison may be made in the matter of CHASTITY: how we live it. If in Europe, in a country where men are inclined to exalt *eros*, the religious finds it his duty to be the witness of the *agape* of Christ, in Africa, for example, he should witness more to a fecundity that is not carnal. He should there seek a way of expressing his vow of

chastity that will best show the possibility of extending the bonds of divine Tenderness beyond the bonds of the flesh, for "*what is born of God is born not of the will of flesh and blood*". We must not push this too far however: the African also has need not to allow himself to be dominated by *eros*. The question is: have we tried sufficiently to discover the attitudes, the concrete implications, which would make our vows, our prayer, our community life in a particular milieu significant for ourselves and for our brothers, and above all make them fully apostolic in their witness after the manner of "*Christ in his apostolic ministry*", as suggested by Libermann.

If, as we have said, religious life is a real walking the martyr way, should we not also examine what our religious witness should be, faced with the rejections characteristic of some societies where we help the local churches: such as, spiritual values in a marxist country, or opposing injustices in Latin America? Doing so, we may perhaps court expulsion, even risk death. What of it? If ALL protest together, as a Spiritan group, in union with the local Church and in the name of the Gospel, this religious witness will be much more convincing, much more truly missionary.

VI – UNITY IN THE PLURALITY OF OUR SPIRITAN LIFE

SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS LIFE CAN NEVER AGAIN BE UNIFORM, NEITHER IN ITS EXPRESSION NOR IN ITS UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS.

EVERY INDIVIDUAL SPIRITAN, EVERY SPIRITAN COMMUNITY, EVERY CIRCUMSCRIPTION MUST NEVERTHELESS SHARE SOME COMMON BOND UNDER PENALTY OF SEEING THE INSTITUTE DISINTEGRATE. "Together" we must seek what it is: it should be possible to express it in a clear definition of what constitutes the orientation of our MISSIONARY LIFE henceforth.

First of all, there are the choices to be made. We should seek our inspiration and meaning in the Scriptures. There are numerous themes we could reflect upon: the dialogue of Jesus with those who were not Jews; the role of the Holy Spirit in the way we live universality; Exodus, the Exile and universality... Our brethren expert in exegesis could be a valuable help in this.

We need also to re-read our Founders critically to re-discover, if it exists, — apart from their definition of religious life in the context of the development of the Church and the world of their day — any deep inspiration, which could give a fresh impetus to the Institute, in con-

tinuity and fidelity. In this seeking, we are led right away to think of all that Libermann had to say, especially on the relationship of the religious and the apostolic life, on our being flexible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, on our adaptation of religious life to missionary situations. Such a work has not yet been begun, for all practical purposes.

There is, especially, the ability to live out in the Institute the new understanding of universality, of which we claim to be witnesses. Internationality we have, certainly, but, also and above all else, there should be at every level of the Institute and in each of us, THE ABILITY TO WELCOME THE SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT, TO NOURISH OUR PRAYER OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING ON THEM, as we are invited to do by our Lord in Luke X, 17-25, and of which he sets us the example in his prayer of blessing. Even in our religious life we should be able to remind ourselves of the wonders wrought by the Lord and allow ourselves little by little to be transformed by them and be witnesses to them. WHEN WE LEARN TO DO THAT TOGETHER THE DANGER OF A RUPTURE WILL HAVE PASSED: FOR EACH OF US WILL HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH AND SOMETHING TO RECEIVE FROM HIS BROTHER. Our meetings would then be directly in line with our living: our joyous thanksgiving for all we have "seen" and "heard" and "lived", after the manner of Christ who willed to draw all men to himself.

Such a UNION IN SHARING would be capable of defying the danger of fragmentation engendered by the necessary diversity of which we spoke. The symbolism of Pentecost shows this: just as the Apostles were about to separate to carry out their MISSION, there was given them, in prayer and fraternal exchange, every assurance of their unity in the Spirit by their sharing in the same flame and in the tongues of fire that descended upon each of them. There is no danger of the Congregation becoming a Babel if, indeed, she bears witness to the possibility of welcoming different languages as expressing the same Spirit: "one in mind and heart". That is the message of Pentecost. That is what we are challenged to witness today. Shall we pick up the gage, resist the temptation to uniformity?

It will be this need to witness to the universality of salvation, to witness to Christ's desire to draw to himself all men, of every race, culture and religion — to recapitulate and restore all things in him — which will determine our following him. Our prayer, our common celebration, even our community life, our vows, will bear the impress of this COMMON BOND, and that although the demands of witness display AN EXTREMELY RICH PLURALITY in the way we live in practice. That is something worth thinking about.

Before the new Foundations force us to do so, we should undertake this research and this conversion. Pluralism, in the name of cultural identity, is already, we are aware, amongst the objectives aimed at by the young committed to the Foundations. Shall we allow this pluralism, in the very name of our vocation today, to witness to the welcome — in unity — of diversity amongst men, races, cultures?

The establishment of new Foundations is a fresh challenge to the 1980 Chapter: not to crush them, not to make them in our own image and likeness: but, to give them every opportunity, by incarnating Spiritan religious life in other cultures, to develop new and unexpected shoots on the old trunk of the Congregation inspired by Libermann.

VII – ONE EXAMPLE AMONGST OTHERS: MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA AND HER CONGREGATION

Jesus spoke in parables: examples and models are often useful to help us to better understand.

In Teresa of Calcutta we have a living example of what could happen in our Institute as a result of a true conversion in our religious life.

What steps did she take? A member of a missionary Congregation, she found herself teaching in a large College. The discovery of a “new and more urgent mission”, the service of the Lord in his brothers dying in the streets of Calcutta, led her to DEVISE FOR THIS NEW MISSION A NEW WAY OF LIVING HER RELIGIOUS LIFE. She had to break away to do so, but we know full well how many young people, impressed by THE COHESION BETWEEN THIS MISSION AND THIS STYLE OF LIFE are drawn by her example. Frequently in recent times, in which she received the Nobel Peace Prize, the story of the development of this congregation has been recounted. Consider carefully. Amongst us also, in the name of the mission, our brethren are seeking a new purpose, a new coherency. Rather than let people leave us one by one, should we not all together undertake a COMMON MIGRATION?

Here we are tempted to quote a well-known Chinese proverb. The wording may not be exact, but the sense of the proverb is as follows: *when on a clear evening with a full moon a finger is lifted to point out the brilliant orb, there will always be found an imbecile to fix his attention on the finger.* As the finger to the moon, so our common

religious life makes sense only in its close relationship to the mission to which we vowed ourselves in the Church.

To criticise Spiritan religious life, and especially to live it without consideration of the mission, is to risk comparison with one who studies the finger, not the moon!

VIII – SOME SIMPLE SUGGESTIONS

What, practically, can be done in the circumstances?

1. NECESSITY OF DISCERNMENT

The first step in restoring to our Spiritan life the COMMON COHERENCE already spoken of is a great movement of DISCERNMENT THROUGHOUT THE INSTITUTE.

The Chapter should ask ALL SPIRITANS to open the eyes of mind and heart WIDE to grasp the questions that present themselves in the place, the mission, in which each one finds himself: the questions posed by the people, the social, political and human structures, the local church and culture, about each one's religious life as a foreigner witnessing to Jesus Christ and the Good News.

They could be formulated thus: "*You claim, by your religious apostolic consecration, to FOLLOW CHRIST, the One sent by his Father to bring all into his Kingdom. In what does this following consist, practically, here and now, for YOU (not for some ideal Spiritan)?*

Then, since we are brothers, share your findings with those who live with you, more or less in the same situation, so that a true assessment may be made. St. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit will be with us in that moment.

Such an assessment is impossible without the participation of the inhabitants of the host-country itself, the Christians, and especially those responsible for the local Church, which allows you to share its mission".

Up to this we have said very little about the HOLY SPIRIT. That will astonish some, no doubt, in an age where all talk of him. We are fully aware of the prominent place he has in the prayer of a religious, still more in that of a "missionary" and even more still in that of a "Spiritan". But, for goodness sake, let us not call upon him too much in our writings or in public prayer as a "stop-gap" for our own ignorance, insufficiency, often intellectual laziness or just plain laziness!

Still, if there is a place where we are certain his action is made manifest, it is in community discernment and the prayer that must necessarily accompany it. In circumstances where this discernment played its part in the Church, the apostles had the incredible audacity — the impudence! — to claim: “*It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...:*” (*Acts 15:28; 13:1-4*).

We owe it to ourselves to call upon him but we must also use all our own powers of intelligence and heart, of dialogue and listening, to enable us to better discern in the Scriptures what essentially is demanded of a missionary in the world of today with all its diversity. We need especially the Spirit, and our own faculties, to read the signs and hear the calls that that same Spirit directs towards us in the practical situation of our daily life.

We are clearly in danger of being overwhelmed by an incredible diversity of demands and choices, more numerous probably than those we have discerned for our mission in 1974. Why not? Our unity will only be strengthened thereby. Not the “unity of uniformity” which always subjects the other to the one who has the power to impose it. That UNITY is not drawn from the Trinity itself, where the persons are different without confusion: yet, so “united” to each other in the inestimable union that makes them ONE. We can participate in that unity by accepting the brother, the District, the International Team that is “different” in the concrete reality of the religious life in which all share, because each in his personal life has the “character” of the missionary call which all of them answered in obedience. So did the Son of God also realise his mission, taking upon himself the condition of those amongst whom he lived without his intimate union with the Father being affected thereby. THIS DISCERNMENT SHOULD BE OPERATIVE AT ALL LEVELS: OF COMMUNITY, OF CIRCUMSCRIPTION AND CONGREGATION. To live faithful to our initial commitments to poverty, chastity and obedience at the present time, presumes in fact our willingness to participate in and submit ourselves to this discerning scrutiny by which we may recognise the calls of the Holy Spirit to give up, in order to follow “Christ the Apostle” our right to possessions, knowledge, power.

2. A SECOND NOVITIATE TO BRING ABOUT A NECESSARY CONVERSION?

This discerning scrutiny will open the way in us, in our circumscriptions, in the whole Congregation, perhaps, to a NECESSARY CONVERSION.

Militant christians are well aware that it is not enough "to see" and "to judge": we must also have the courage to ACT. The action required of us is not indeed the easiest. IT THEREFORE REQUIRES A PAUSE FOR REFLECTION.

Every new prophetic mission recorded in the Bible was preceded by a period spent in the desert. "Fasting", "Prayer", "Meditation" are necessary to imprint permanently on us the character of the call we receive: otherwise it will be lost in the noisy disorder of our activity. "*What man, before building a tower, does not first sit down to consider?*"... like Christ himself, before launching out on our apostolic adventure, we must let the word of God overcome in us the attractive temptations of possessions, knowledge and power ("*for it is written*"... *study the temptations of Our Lord in the desert!*)

We have already established Renewal Courses for updating our pastoral, theology, catechetics, in the light of the new mission. EVERY SPIRITAN SHOULD ALSO RENEW HIS NOVITIATE. A SHORT ANNUAL RETREAT IS NOT ENOUGH.

In France, Mortain set out to meet this request. All those who took part agreed unanimously that it was their apostolic religious life that benefited most from this. Perhaps, one of our first priorities should be to ask every Spiritan, AS IT WERE, TO REPEAT HIS NOVITIATE: Jesuits have their year of "tertianship". This is important. It is not primarily to remind us of the great points around which religious life revolves, although even there there has been considerable research in recent times, a research which reveals many unexpected aspects on living religious life today⁵. The essential task would be RE-ORIENTATE OUR LIVES, IN MEDITATION AND PRAYER, TO THE LIGHT OF THE COMMON BOND BETWEEN OUR RELIGIOUS AND OUR APOSTOLIC LIFE, RE-FORMULATED IN TERMS OF THE EVOLUTION OF OUR APOSTOLIC MISSION OVER THE LAST DECADE.

The result of such a discernment at the level of our community, our circumscription and, hopefully, the General Chapter, would bring about the conditions of desired conversion. How, you may ask? Rather, we reply, as the new and unexpected discovery of the call of the pagans "opened the hearts of those who heard" the words of Peter on universality, spoken after his meeting with the centurion, Cornelius (*Acts 10 : 34-35, 44-48*). Theirs was truly a "conversion" once they saw clearly in the apostolic action what the Holy Spirit expected of

⁵ For instance, Tillard, Santaner, Ayel in France.

them. Although often viewed as merely a change of pastoral practice, this even was primarily a true interior and community conversion.

The same could be said of those who took part in the council of Jerusalem (*Acts 15:12 and 28*) whose lives were deeply transformed because they had made the discovery that pagans also had been called. The participants were changed, after the community had discerned together what the Spirit expected of them.

Could not each circumscription (Province or District) have some place which would be, as it were THE PLACE OF CONVERSION, a "desert place", a house of prayer? In such a house our brethren could come for, say, three months, to experience under the responsibility of the Provincial or Principal Superior an intense life of prayer, silence and community life, but also of discernment and exchange of views. It would indeed be a "privileged place" where they could hear the appeals made by the country and the local church to "our Spiritan life".

3. AN INSTITUTIONAL REFORM: MAKE DISTRICT CHAPTERS OBLIGATORY; PROVIDE A FORUM FOR SMALLER GROUPING.

An institutional change is what we would wish to propose to the General Chapter in the third and final place. We would ask it to MAKE IT OBLIGATORY TO HAVE DISTRICT CHAPTERS.

We have already seen that for the exercise of real discernment and the maintenance of unity in diversity WE MUST NEGLECT NO SECTION, IF THE COMMON SAP, WHICH ALONE CAN REVIVIFY THE INSTITUTE, IS REALLY AND FREELY TO CIRCULATE IN THE WHOLE BODY. Each of our brethren must have a part in the discernment of the Lord's appeal to our Spiritan religious life in all the places, all the churches, where we live our Spiritan mission.

Much could be said so that there might be a true sharing, even in our Provinces, that the power of speech be not reserved to those who have the knowledge or the power, that all may be free to tell what the Holy Spirit asks of us Spiritans in the reality and diversity of MISSIONARY SITUATIONS.

But, in our view, there is something more important still that calls for our attention: THE ALMOST TOTAL ABSENCE OF DISTRICT OR OF REGIONAL CHAPTERS IN THOSE AREAS WHERE WE ARE MOST MISSIONARILY ACTIVE. It would be a mistake to conclude that these areas are the most living of our Spiritan action because there are no Chapters at this level, the most silent of all on our missionary religious life.

It may be replied that Superiors of Districts or of other Spiritan groups are present at the Provincial Chapters of their respective Provinces and that often they have other delegates also at these Chapters: everyone, moreover, is represented in the General Chapter. Consider well the real question, starting simply at the grass-roots. What does a Spiritan confrere do in these circumstances except "delegate" people to speak in his name to assemblies who issue directives to him later: directives which he may or may not read, directives which he may or may not put into practice.

There are, admittedly, few Districts today where there are not regional gatherings where all come together (2nd February). But these are not the places of discernment of which we have been speaking.

WHAT DISTRICTS HAVE GRASPED THE NETTLE OF THE PROBLEM OF THE NEW COMMON BOND BETWEEN OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSION TODAY? Can it be said that the District Superiors and delegates come to Provincial or General Chapters bringing the fruits of the common discernment of the Spirit capable of enriching the whole Institute? Do they at least come to swell a real prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of the whole Institute, as is our first duty in the Church, thanksgiving for the marvels it has been given us to see and to achieve?

What are the facts? Since it is the Provinces of origin that hold Chapters, and that every three years now, they are the ones WHO GLOBALLY DICTATE THE STYLE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE INSTITUTE.

It is undoubtedly just that they have the right "to hold chapters", but there is a danger also that they be too prescriptive. Clearly, the Provincial delegates, especially the more important ones, coming with the accumulated knowledge of what took place at previous Provincial assemblies, will orientate the assembly more easily.

Are the Provinces the only places that can really discern what Spiritan religious life actually means? By reason of the similarity of their mission of formation, of supporting the older members, of missionary animation in local churches of Christian tradition, their approach to migrants, to education, etc... their attitude to the problems of Spiritan life are almost the same everywhere. THIS UNANIMITY WEIGHS UPON THE INSTITUTE IN GENERAL. So, though we may not wish it, we perpetuate to some extent THE PRE-CONCILIAR STATUS QUO in the sense that "the wind always blows from the West"!

Add to this the fact that it is the Provinces who capitalise most on the reflections of the not inconsiderable number of actual theorists of religious life, to understand the danger of a one-dimension only research. How can Madagascar's feeble voice make itself heard in such

a "heavy weight of sound" of Europe or America? Yet, anyone reading the reports (*Spiritan News*, № 19) knows well the last Chapter of that District has many things to say of value to the Institute. Quite clearly, the brethren in Madagascar did seek the "common bond" between their mission in that country and their Spiritan missionary vocation. With the stethoscope of Libermann they had listened carefully to the heart-beat of their country and the Madagascan Church. They had invited priests, religious and even lay-people of the country to share their deliberations⁶. We are sure that a more sensitive hearing given to this District, and all the others, and to the International Teams officially commissioned by the General Council to open up new fields of Spiritan mission, would contribute greatly to the renewal of the religious life of the whole Institute, and of the Provinces themselves in the first place.

All such data would be an invaluable help to those who have the task of training today the mission workers of tomorrow, and also to those responsible (should that ever come about) for the centres of "second novitiate" of which we have spoken.

Another question, which should be answered also, is: HOW REPRESENTATIVE ARE OUR CHAPTERS, ESPECIALLY THE GENERAL CHAPTER? Without daring to say so openly, we remain prisoners of the democratic rules of modern states, although well aware of their deficiencies. Is the rule "one Spiritan, one vote" the best? It is evident that, under this system, International Teams (Pakistan, Paraguay) will never be represented in a way such that we can hear clearly what they have to say to us!

And what of the CONSECRATED LAYMEN? The 1980 General Chapter already furnishes the reply: just one Brother-delegate for the whole of the Institute! This is not the way we shall "declericalise" the Congregation even a little! And, if we do not seek to have them better represented, we cannot help in their quest those young men who have chosen our Spiritan life to live mission in a new way, a way which will not be authoritarian or clerical, but one of giving evangelical witness to work among their lay brethren. Some of them would have much to

⁶ We know that many Districts have put forward serious reasons for not having Chapters. Have these not been somewhat exaggerated, especially the fear that such gatherings might give offence to the local clergy? Perhaps it is that, in such cases, the uniqueness of our religious life has not been asserted sufficiently. Madagascar had not this fear. Elsewhere too, this problem must have had to be faced: it would be interesting to know the answers.

say, even now, but with our present system they will remain forgotten and unheard. We must find a means of giving them a hearing.

That said, it still remains true: the best means of assuring the success of our enterprise is still to listen to and apply in practice the fundamental advice of Libermann:

*"THE BEST COURSE IS:
TO KEEP OUR EYES FIXED ON OUR LORD
IN HIS LIFE OF MINISTRY, AND ON THE APOSTLES:
THESE ARE OUR MODELS".*

René YOU, C.S.S.P.

A SPIRITAN WAY OF HOLINESS

This study follows the inductive method. It has been my privilege to preach many retreats to Spiritans around the globe, to have had many personal exchanges with young people in formation, with missionaries in the fulness of their apostolic activity, and with sick or aged confreres in the infirmary at Chevilly, speaking with the lucidity of those already looking into a world beyond. Many confreres have spoken to me about their interior life, “hidden in Christ Jesus” (Col. 3 : 3), which lay at the heart of their call and their total giving of themselves to the Lord that His kingdom “might come close to those who are far” (Yves Raguin). Reviewing these confidential exchanges in the light of Fr. Libermann’s writings, I have discovered an astonishing harmony with the essence of his spiritual doctrine, with the main lines of a way of missionary spirituality which he traced out, as a result of his own interior experience and the charism of leadership given him by the Holy Spirit.

I have called this reflection of mine ‘A Spiritan Way of Holiness’. The article is deliberately indefinite. There are undoubtedly other similar ways, as the number and diversity of mansions in the House of God would imply. This one I have myself observed and I will try to describe it. I speak of ‘A Spiritan Way of Holiness’, not of ‘A Way of Spiritan Holiness’. For, in fact, the foundations and modalities of the spiritual life are all clearly set out in the Gospel. In that sense, there is only one spirituality: to listen to the Word of God and to submit ourselves totally to His Will in the spirit of the Beatitudes. On the other hand, the historical context, previous spiritual currents, the personality of a great charismatic figure, can bring out a particular aspect of the Gospel which throws light on all the others. Thus, the period when the hermits withdrew into the desert to live with God alone, far from paganism, flowered in Benedict, who added to the religious life of solitude a union with God lived in community in the service of the Church. Later, decadence in the life of the Church would inspire the way of poverty of St. Francis and the vast stream of Franciscan life that would flow from it. So too in the 19 th century, the abolition of slavery and the opening up of Africa awakened the intrepid zeal of

Libermann and gave rise to a particular mystique of apostolate lived under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The spirituality remains always the same but a particular aspect is stressed, in certain historical circumstances, under the lead of a particular man or woman of God, and this is destined to be continued by his disciples, who are also called by God to walk the same road, with their own particular talents. This is often referred to as the charism of an institute, which Fr. James Walsh, S. J., defines as "the spiritual gift of the Founder in which all members of his institute share, in accordance with the gifts given to each by the Holy Spirit". Thus it is that the Spirit guides the Church to the fulfilment in time of the eternal project of the Father's love with regard to men. Holiness is "conformity to the Son, in the Father's presence, in love" (Eph. 1 : 4). It is within the limits imposed by all these nuances that I have chosen the title 'A Spiritan Way of Holiness'.

I have known few Spiritans who joined the Congregation because it was a religious institute; most were attracted rather by its missionary ideal. They had felt called personally by God to announce the Gospel 'ad gentes' and to place themselves wholly at the service of the most abandoned peoples. When, during the novitiate year, they learnt that for us that also meant commitment to religious life, in the generosity of their young hearts they saw this as fairly clearly united with missionary life. Poverty in union with the poor; celibacy that they might be more available to them; obedience to those in charge of the Congregation and of the Church they were called to serve; community of life with those dedicated to the same ideal: all this seemed a natural part of the global missionary project. They did not go into subtle distinctions which, because of the 'identity crisis', have been so much discussed in our day. "Called to be apostles, set aside to preach the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1 : 1), they gave their lives to the great cause of missionary apostolate, in an institute which attracted them as much by its lifestyle, incarnated in some missionary Father or Brother, friend or relative, as by its tradition of heroism, tinged maybe with a certain triumphalism. More were inspired by the pioneering spirit of a Mgr Le Roy than by the detailed centralizing apparatus of the Congregation, introduced by those who assumed office after the bold and innovative approach of Fr. Libermann.

But they were also influenced by a sound interior formation inspired by the spiritual writers who sprang up in our Provinces in

recent decades. These authors of Spiritan books, whose "memory is revered", as Scripture puts it, were not always in agreement with the conquering spirit of the great missionaries of their time; frequently and with insistence they recalled the mystical basis of mission as conceived by the Founder. If they had been listened to more attentively, possibly some of the mistakes now regretted might have been avoided. They saw Fr. Libermann as a master both of spirituality and of missionary action, and said that we are called to follow him in both, never separating the one from the other. I remember hearing of a remark made in Paris by Fr. Pascal on the day of his jubilee. In proposing the toast, Mgr Le Roy, with his usual mischievous humour, remarked: "Father Pascal, when you were my novice master you told me I had not got the spirit of the Congregation." The old man stood up at once and added: "I could say as much today."

This Spiritan tradition lives on in our time, including both a missionary impulse and a concern for a sound spiritual life in harmony with it. We are happy to see it alive today in the formation of our young members, in new and updated ways. In the well known Letter 196 (French ed., Vol. II, p. 385), Fr. Libermann traced his approach to the interior formation of the young men who came to him: "I began," he wrote, "by giving him a sound idea of Christian perfection... I tried to show him this perfection in all its aspects... I tried to eliminate the danger of impetuousness, agitation, anxiety, so that he might be always at ease in the presence of God... I insisted very much on interior and universal renunciation, basing peace itself on this."

In general, this approach has been the basis of the spiritual life of many, with perhaps a greater emphasis in our time on the Word of God. The conviction that it is "He who first loved us" (1 Jn 4:10), and our acceptance of this love, have been the starting point of our relationship with Christ. This quickly developed into an experience of friendship and of reciprocal exchange with Him: "He loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20); "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:38); "All that I have is yours" (Lk 15:31). New light is shed on the Gospel and love leads to conformity of wills; freedom and joy prevail, and it seems as if no obstacle can come between us and our gift of self: "I call you no longer servants but friends" (Jn 15:15).

Then the time comes, after months or years or decades (it varies according to the gifts and the faithfulness of each), when the Lord,

wishing to draw a person into closer union with Him, leads him into the ‘cloud of darkness’. The young missionary has already come up against some of the difficulties of his vocation and, sustained by the spirit of his first fervour, has overcome them easily. During his early work in the missions, or in Europe or America, he has experienced obstacles to his apostolic activity. Whether a cleric or a Brother, he is well aware of his weakness and the moments of discouragement in community life and in his preaching of the Gospel. But in all these difficulties he finds strength in the love of Christ that he experiences, and he repeats to himself the words of St. Paul: “I know who I have entrusted my life to” (2 Tim. 1 : 12).

Little by little, a new phenomenon takes place. Among contemplatives it is almost exclusively linked with interior progress. With the Spiritan it is related to other trials, disappointments and setbacks coming from community or professional life (studies, relationships, loss of dear ones, health, etc.) and especially from the apostolate. Eagerly, he has learnt a new language, immersed himself in a new local culture, catechumens have increased, treks into the bush have borne fruit, churches have been built, new communities have been established and lay leaders trained. It is a time of euphoria following vigorous and absorbing action; the ship is in full sail and all is well. The missionary is exhausted but happy. “I kill myself for Christ” was how one of them put it to me. (The above examples are from a missionary context and would have to be adapted for those whose apostolate is in Europe or America, but the problems are fundamentally the same.)

Then suddenly there are contrary winds. Doubts arise. A catechist on whom one counted most abandons his ministry or foments suspicion. Rivalries, jealousies, difficulties with those in charge of the mission or of the local Church, or even with the Superiors of the Congregation become burdensome. The climate-accentuated fatigue due to the hard work of the first years weighs more heavily. The efficacy of a particular strategy is called in question, the validity of local apostolic methods, even the legitimacy of the superhuman task itself. The boat is tempest-tossed and the Lord is silent, asleep. Many experience this in their missionary work, at a time when they have no true spiritual support and are unable to open their hearts to a friend who could interpret what has happened for them in the light of the Paschal mystery. Their confreres are often unable to explain these happenings other than with glib replies that provide no solution. Former psychological difficulties, long dormant, now surface again. One says, for example; “After all, everyone can be saved in his own religion. It is better for

us to concentrate on development alone. Is that not also a form of apostolic witness? Liberation, social justice, yes; the proclamation of the Kingdom will come later.” The temptation is there and God is silent. What has happened?

God is certainly the ‘One who is close to us’. Previous experience has assured us of that, marked as it has been by religious sentiment, itself an important element of love. We have witnessed to it in our catechesis, our preaching, our service of the most needy and our ministry in general. But He is also the ‘Totally Other’, the All-Holy One. When He draws near to anyone who has given his life and heart to Him, who has lived with Him in a relationship of generous and sincere love, with the zeal that that implies, night must necessarily fall. Why? Because we cannot possess Him with our small limited means; it is He who possesses us in His own infinite way. “My glory I give to none” (Is. 42 : 8). It is not we who have the direction of affairs in our hands; it is the Spirit of Jesus and of his Father that operates in and through us. A basic attitude begins to appear: that of one who places himself at God’s disposal and expects everything from His; the man who is truly poor in spirit and who allows God to do “great things” to him and through him, as He did with Mary. What should one do at this stage? One should wait confidently, happy even to be no longer aware of His presence, enjoy His words or feel close to His person; content to repeat to oneself that He “will be with us always...” This imposes certain conditions on us. Fr. Libermann reduces them to three fundamental ones: to be present to God, to be aware of self, to renounce oneself. Presence of God, practised as an exercise in time of private prayer and as a pervasive state at all hours of the day. Awareness of self, which supposes that we live in a state of habitual mastery of our reactions, our natural impetuosity. And finally, the evangelical radicalism of total self-giving: “Let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Lk 9 : 23). And all should be done, Libermann adds, with immense trust in God our Father, who loves us and whose Holy Spirit is always at work to conform us more and more to the image of Christ. Our weaknesses no longer worry us, for He is truly our Father and we constantly experience His tender care. Day after day too we learn that only Jesus, in us, can be meek and humble of heart. We have to make our own the Incarnate Word’s attitude of loving sonship to the Father. “A missionary who lacks these two great and sanctifying virtues (of meekness and humility of heart) is a stunted person in the apostolate of Christ, even though he may have the zeal of a Vincent de Paul or a Francis Xavier” (Libermann, 8 May 1851).

For Libermann, the most active man is the most passive, in the sense of the most submissive to the action of the Holy Spirit.

"If Our Lord gives His Spirit to us, it is not that we may live, even in part, according to our own spirit. He must be our Leader, our Love, our All. Since the Holy Spirit is essentially the Love of God, it follows that everything in us must spring from this love, be accompanied by it and mount straight to God... If we wish to hear Him, to see Him and to advance under His guidance, we must pay attention to His inspirations, keep our eyes always fixed on Him, practise interior silence, i.e. the control of all our passions, avoid excessive activity, and desire no other wisdom or prudence than that which comes from the Holy Spirit. We should also avoid all merely natural effort to unite ourselves to Him. All should be done in complete peace and tranquillity of soul. It is in these dispositions, always ready to follow and never to precede Him, that we may expect from Him whatever He wishes to show us or to achieve through us" (Conference on the Feast of Pentecost, 'Ecrits Spirituels', p. 79).

It is the Holy Spirit who allows the missionary, in the very heart of his apostolic activity, to become more and more son with the Son, "to the glory of the Father". The more he experiences his total dependence on God, the more he experiences also the absoluteness of God: "God is all, man is nothing". His very vocation as a Spiritan, "a stranger in his Father's house", calls him to recognize this daily. The painful effort to enter into another culture and civilization, another mentality and language ("Language," says Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince, "is a source of misunderstandings"), the engagement in a pastoral project that is often not his own, and with local apostles so different from himself: all this leads him to live the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, to renounce himself and live in union with the suffering Servant. His apparent impotence in the face of the powers of darkness, "the spirits of evil" spoken of by St. Paul (Eph. 6:12), leads him to abandon himself completely to Christ, murmuring in his turn also: "When I am weak, then I am strong". His private prayer becomes that of "pure faith and simplicity" (Libermann). He expects all from God with active certitude; he knows that the Mission is His work; he realizes that the Holy Spirit alone, who is its Protagonist, can bring someone to say: "Jusus is the Lord" (Phil. 2:11). The Mission appears as the working of God's Spirit in the hearts of non-Christians: "it consists in the light it focuses on Jesus Christ" (Taylor: Faith and Constitution). He holds himself before God, in the darkness of his

night, with unshakeable confidence in the power and love of Him who sends him: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4: 13).

"As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (Jn 22: 21). Fr. Libermann comments as follows: "Jesus Christ sends us as He was sent. Our mission is His. It is Jesus who lives in those He sends, who suffers in those He sends, who draws souls to His Father and communicates His graces through those He sends" ('Ecrits Spirituels', p. 374). Little by little, the missionary allows himself to be led personally by the Spirit of God, while holding himself before Him — and in his dealings with men — as an instrument of His divine action, as was Peter in the conversion of Cornelius. "The Kingdom of God in His Son, and through Him in the Church, can be known truly only through a living faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and not through merely human research. For, as St. Paul says, the things of God can be known only through the Spirit of God, who reveals to us not only His reign in the Church and His relations with men, but even the depths of His divinity" (Libermann: Commentary on St. John, French ed., p. 79).

The mysterious Person of the Holy Spirit now reveals Himself to a certain extent, more in His action than in His proper being. I have known more than one who has thus discovered the full reality of the word 'Spiritian' and of his consecration to the Holy Spirit. Always, at the same time, there is a totally personal rediscovery of Mary, with complete abandonment of the missionary's person and activity to Our Lady, in preparation for the Holy Spirit's 'invasion' of his soul. "The Holy Spirit is the one who, today as in the beginnings of the Church, acts in every missionary who allows himself to be possessed and led by Him, and places on his lips words he himself could never have discovered, while predisposing the soul of him who listens, to make him more open and welcoming to the Good News and the kingdom proclaimed" (Evangelii Nuntiandi). "You will receive the Holy Spirit and bear witness to me" (Acts 1: 8). "The way followed," writes Léon Dufour, speaking of St. Francis Xavier, "is not so much the conquest of the world by the apostle as the conquest of the apostle by God; or rather, it is through the conquest of the world that the apostle allows himself to be conquered by God. Behind the apostolic journeys there is the conflict in the missionary's heart... behind the man of action is one who suffers the divine action on himself." And Madeline Delbrel says: "Faced with the task of spreading the Gospel, what counts is not so much the small number of missionaries as whether they walk boldly and with hope."

Fr. Libermann quickly entered upon this way of total submission to the Holy Spirit, most likely during or at the end of the five years following his baptism, during which period, he wrote, "the Lord held all my faculties absorbed and captive". And so, though not yet a priest, he was sought after as a spiritual guide, even by his seminary professors and directors.

"This is a most critical period," writes Libermann. "It is probably the most dangerous of all for souls, and their whole life depends on it... This is where the majority, the great majority, of souls abandon the true way of mental prayer, because of anxiety, discouragement, false convictions, obstinacy, rigidity, impatience, self-love... Torn between God and creatures, they are never wholly generous; they do not fly along God's ways but walk with leaden feet. They do much for love of God, but their love, though genuine, is often mixed" (*Instructions on Prayer*, French ed., p. 228). Experience bears out the truth of this quotation, which reveals an exceptional knowledge of human weakness.

In 1838 he had written: "Read Father Lallement and you will discover all the principles, as in St. John of the Cross. The doctrine is sound. You have only to put it into practice" ('*Lettres Spirituelles*', II, 49). Fr. Lallement had been a renowned Director of the Jesuit Tertiationship at the end of the 17th century, and his talks had been published under the title '*Spiritual Doctrine*'. The Jesuit Tertiationship is a third year of novitiate, made after the first ten years in the ministry. St. Ignatius calls it the "*schola affectus*", the school of the heart. Fr. Lallement sees it as the "*second conversion*", the decisive moment when the apostle hands over the guidance of his life to the Holy Spirit. Modern authors call this the swing of the pendulum, whereby the Spirit of God takes over control of the depths of the apostle's heart, for whom the ideal is to remain as passive as possible: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God" (Rom. 8:14) — "*Qui Spiritu Dei aguntur*", a passive verb expressing the reality of this deep union.

"We spend whole years," writes Lallement, "often a whole life, bargaining as to whether we shall give ourselves wholly to God. We cannot bring ourselves to make the full sacrifice... We struggle with God for years and resist the movements of His grace, as it urges us to abandon our cares by giving ourselves unreservedly to Him. But,

weighed down by self-love, blinded by ignorance, held back by false fears, we do not dare to cross the threshold. . . ”

The phrase “to cross the threshold” is well known in the writings of Lallemant, Surin, Voillaume and other classical spiritual writers. Fr. Libermann took up the idea, insisting particularly on the total abnegation of the missionary as a ‘conditio sine qua non’ of entry into this new life. St. John of the Cross was equally radical in his expression: “Whether the bird is held by a thread or by a cable, it cannot fly”. When we speak today of ‘Spiritual Renewal’, my thoughts always turn to this ‘Second Conversion’.

Where do we Spiritans stand on this? How are we “crossing the threshold”? It is impossible to have an objective judgement on a large number: the ways of God are always mysterious. “The wind blows where it wills; you know not whence it comes nor where it goes” (Jn 3 : 8). The interior development of each person is unique and privileged; his personal prayer is the echo and the sustenance of it.

Some are attuned to the desire, the waiting upon, the passive welcome of the Spirit of God; the prayer of others arises out of their pastoral situations, such as contact with the poor in the slums or their work with catechists or Catholic Action. Others make the human and cultural values of their people an object of praise to the Lord: “so that the pagans become an offering agreeable to God, sanctified in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15 : 16). Others — not as often as one would wish — have the good fortune to share in a truly fraternal community in which community prayer, nourished upon the apostolic work of each, leads spontaneously to the silence of adoration, thanksgiving and desire of God. Others, after the example of Christ, withdraw to the countryside to commune with God, in the difficult moments of their ministry, taking advantage of a quiet morning or evening to do so. Others again have given up solitary prayer and need a time of retreat, a long period of asceticism and of special interior light, to enable them to start again and persevere. A spiritual guide is then advisable: when Paul on the road to Damascus asked, “Lord, what would you have me to do?”, the reply he received was to go to Ananias for the answer.

On the other hand, objective discernment is possible in person-to-person exchange with one accustomed to the ways of God. A ‘second conversion’ of this kind has been seen among older confreres, who at times have had to seek such support from outside their own community. In personal conversation with my confreres, I have always been deeply impressed by the astonishing generosity with which they

have given themselves to the service of the poor, and in general to their apostolic work (in which I include, naturally, the dedicated service of our religious lay-brothers). What has equally impressed me was their joy in the realization of how, in calling them to the ministry, the Lord had called them to a special intimacy with Him, to be "a chosen instrument to carry my name to the pagans" (Acts 9 : 15), and how, at the heart of their ministry, the Father unites them ever more closely to His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, working in them and in their apostolate. Fr. Libermann expressed this link between life and apostolate in his well-known saying: "The apostolic life is nothing else than the life of love and holiness that the Son of God led on earth, through which He sacrificed Himself continually to the glory of His Father for the salvation of the world". They had known this well in theory, but in the heat of action they had unconsciously abandoned its practice. What a comfort, then, to have rediscovered the original meaning of their call, "lest, having preached to others, I should myself become a castaway" (1 Cor. 9 : 27). I can still remember their joy at living thereafter in the light, the peace, the fire of the Holy Spirit. I also remember the interior struggle some had to endure, like Jacob and the Angel, until the moment when they gave themselves wholly into the hands of God: "I will praise you, Lord my God; you have laid your hand on me" (Ps. 138 : 5). In the text on religious life submitted to the members of the General Chapter, a kind of second novitiate, in view of this 'second conversion', is proposed, and I fully support the proposal.

At the end of this stage of spiritual development, like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, the Lord reveals Himself in the Trinitarian mystery of His Divine Unity. I can think of no better way of expressing it than in the words of that magnificent text from St. Paul (2 Cor. 3 : 18): "And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit." The glory that shone in the face of Moses, when he encountered God, was passing; ours is permanent. The Greek verb employed in the above text implies that it is not a question merely of 'seeing as in a mirror' or of 'reflecting as in a mirror' but both at once: we see and we reflect the glory of God by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul continues (4 : 6): "It is the same God that said, 'Let there be light shining out of darkness', who has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the

knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ." But he hastens to add: "We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us... Always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body... So death is at work in us, but life in you."

This new experience of God is accompanied, then, by apostolic trials — and by persecutions, as foretold by Christ — but these are immediately seen as redemptive action in the Pasch of Christ: "If we suffer with Him, we will live with Him." The missionary now has an intense share in Christ's redeeming work: his efficacy in the Mystical Body transcends time and space. This is not always visible to the external eye; sometimes exterior humiliations give the opposite impression. "Crosses are golden, but humiliations are diamonds", wrote Fr. Libermann, who had personal experience of it. No matter. The Holy Spirit is present, and these passing weaknesses are merely a step back in order to jump forward better. They give hope and dispose to true wisdom.

The great revelation at this time is that of the Father. In fleeting moments that give a foretaste of eternity, above and beyond mere image or sentiment, the Person of the Father in all His infinite tenderness is revealed: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God" (Jn 17 : 3). This knowledge of the secret of the Father is a wondrous gift, that goes on increasing. The Spiritan is thus illumined with a new knowledge, so as to better reveal the Father, especially to those of the great religions, whose knowledge of Him is limited to certain aspects. He is confirmed in his mission, the mission of Jesus Himself: to make known the Father. This is the moment, difficult for men of action to perceive, when the higher faculties are purified to receive a revelation of God, surpassing all understanding: "We teach," says St. Paul, "what Scripture calls 'the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him'... The depths of God can only be known by the Spirit of God... We have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us" (1 Cor. 2 : 9-12). At this stage the missionary is filled with the peace of God; all is accepted and lived in reference to Him. Here too, here especially, the experience of God is unique, peculiar to each one, and difficult to express in human terms. It is lived in utter silence, words being unnecessary to those who love. "What more shall I have

in Heaven?" said St. Theresa of the Child Jesus before her death. "True, I shall see God. But, as to being with Him, I am that already in this world."

The hazards of the apostolic life have not changed. It is always "the sting in the flesh", of which St. Paul spoke, that keeps the apostle as a mere instrument of God's power. "One sows and another reaps" (Jn. 4 : 37). The Spiritan is convinced that somehow the harvest will come — even in some place not his own — according to God's plan and in virtue of the redemptive work Christ pursues in him: "In my own body I help to pay off the debt which the afflictions of Christ still leave to be paid, for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col. 1 : 24). Even the sorrow to which St. Francis gave expression on the roads of his native Umbria — "Love is not loved" — is no longer something negative in his life but a deep desire for the coming of God's Kingdom: "Father, may Thy Kingdom come!" — which the Eastern Church expresses as: "Father, may Thy Holy Spirit come!" "Our sorrow should include an immense joy," writes Fr. Libermann, "communicated to us by the Spirit of Jesus" (*Lettres Spirituelles*, pp. 5-6).

This new step forward, as we see, is lived by the missionary in the crucible of his apostolic work (though we should remember that the stages often overlap). Libermann's own experience of it is well known. He was at Rennes, novice master to the Eudists, in a state of extreme solitude, vividly conscious of his own uselessness ("my greatest suffering was to find myself useless in the Church of God"), an object of contempt (on the part of M. Brandt) or of indifference on the part of his friends (M. Louis, the superior). He was convinced he had done nothing for God ("What I am sure of is that I have done great harm to all the souls whom it pleased the Lord to put in touch with me" — N.D. I, 500 & 674). We know what followed: on 28 October 1839, which he regarded as "one of the happiest days of my life", there came to him, clearly, the call of the missions. He would leave for Rome to found a missionary Congregation, which would be the work of God alone: "I am the happiest man in the world for I now have nothing but God". We shall have no further confidences on his union with God. He has entered into that stage of intimacy that Ruysbroeck calls "transcendental union", of which the most characteristic sign is an unassailable peace in the midst of consuming labour: "The busier I am, the stronger is my union with God." He explained the secret of it in the words "practical union", which he began to use during the last months of his life. "The essential thing," he writes, "is to live all day long in practical union with God, not merely by carrying out our

sacred duties, but also by being gently and quietly watchful over oneself and acting in all things in conformity with God's good pleasure, in a spirit of faith and love." "Let us aim ever higher," he says to Mother Javouhey, "let us strengthen our souls amidst difficulties, but let us not worry if we have to wait for the successful outcome of our projects. Let us not desire good more than God does nor in ways different from His. Having done all that depends on us, we must rely on Him for success, and be happy, whatever the result." His immediate assistant, Fr. Levavasseur, testified at the cause for his beatification: "Seeing everything in God at all times, he relied upon Him absolutely and remained utterly calm, accepting all that came from His hands. I have never seen him preoccupied in a human way."

With deep admiration and joy I have listened to Spiritan confreres expressing themselves, with discretion, on this life of union that had become their own. It was a grace from the Lord for me, in Chevilly, to follow the last weeks or months of sick missionaries, consumed by their love of God and men, by their desire to be even now, especially now, redeemers with Christ in their sufferings and in their death, with an almost childlike love of Mary. "Say the Magnificat aloud when you see me going." "I would never have imagined it so easy to die." "Don't stay up with me tonight. I can go alone. I see the Father opening His arms to receive me." "In these few months of illness I have made giant strides," said a young confrere dying of cancer, quoting the Psalmist. "It is really something to be a Spiritan. I am grateful to the Congregation. What a beautiful life Our Lord has given me!" What I remember especially is their conviction that their missionary work was not over; that it would continue in heaven till the end of time; that they would not be inactive before God, but, with their confreres in heaven, would be missionaries forever, gathered around Fr. Libermann and Fr. Poullart des Places. Their death, united to that of Christ, would be, in His Pasch, a fruitful and enduring source of resurrection across the ages.

"The African peoples will not be converted by the efforts of clever and capable missionaries — they do not need them — but by the holiness and sacrifice of those who are to save them" (1851). "I sometimes have very bad moments, when I think of the continual sufferings of those poor children. I say to myself that there is material there for the making of great saints. This thought causes me great distress" (1851). "'I have come to cast fire on the earth,' says Jesus. Wishing

to do so, He will certainly put flaming torches in the hands of those He calls to light it. Why then are there so few to touch off the fire? It is because there are not many saints; the torches are weak, producing at most the flicker of a match... If the apostles of Jesus Christ remain lovers of self, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not granted, the plans of God are obstructed, and the people remain in darkness. Why and for how long?" (Instructions to Missionaries, 1851). "Do not despise the words of this poor Father of yours, for God has given me the grace to direct in His ways the servants He has chosen" (*Ibid.*).

I would like to end with the above quotations from our Venerable Father during his last months. Shortly after, in 1853, his personal secretary, Fr. Lannurien, said: "Have we the virtues that would equip us for our purpose and would draw confreres to us? We must admit that we lack many of them and that there is a great difference between the Father and his sons." This is the same Fr. Lannurien who had the happy thought of taking copious notes of the talks given by Fr. Libermann — notes now gathered together in the well-known 'Glose' or Commentary — and who, in a handwritten letter preserved at the French Seminary in Rome, of which he was the founder, described the spirit of the Congregation as follows: "a spirit of interior and exterior simplicity; a great interior spirit consisting of a life of union with Our Lord and of absolute sacrifice; charity and fraternal union; a tender and more than ordinary devotion to Mary; and our vocation to serve the most neglected souls."

There appear thus, from this brief study, a certain number of characteristics that might be described as 'the Spiritan reality' — that which makes us, wherever we are, "of every race and tongue and nation", in accordance with our common calling and our personal gifts, and in the richness of our diversity, ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL.

Alphonse GILBERT, C.S.Sp.

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A collection of annotated texts of Fr Libermann forming a sort of autobiography has been attractively edited in French by Fr Alphonse GILBERT, **Tu as mis sur moi ta main**. An English version will be published.

Fr Peter Oduenyi DIKE of the Nigerian Province has written a thesis of some 350 pages in French on **The Missionary Thought of Venerable Libermann according to the two Memoranda to the Propaganda, 1840 and 1846.** We congratulate him on this valuable work of scholarship.

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SCUOLA TIPOGRAFICA S. PIO X - VIA ETRUSCHI, 7 - ROMA

GENERALATE, C.S.Sp.
CLIVO DI CINNA 195
00136 ROMA